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Arthur's Final Morn

Fiction by J. Robert King

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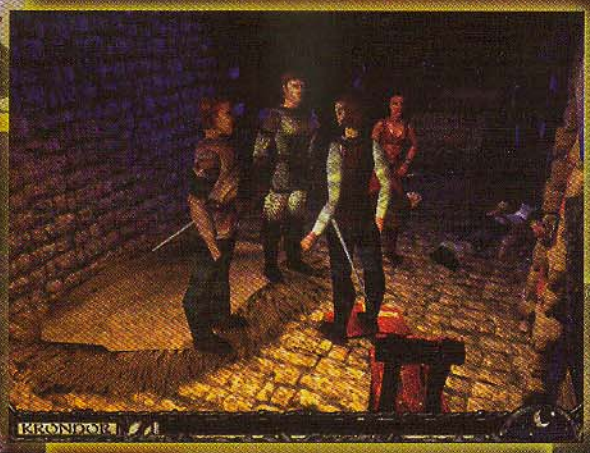

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On the Cover

Legendary artist Jeff Easley portrays life when your neighbor just might be a giant among men.

The Wyrm's Turn™

The Pitfalls of Roleplaying

A couple of weeks ago, the boys and I finally made the time to play some D&D® on Sunday afternoon. None of us, except maybe Chris, had been playing much D&D this year. We were all a bit shy of the game after the catastrophic events of the Door Committee (as chronicled here in issue #243). As it turned out, this group's greatest failing wasn't indecision but roleplaying.

Chris insisted that the players start their PCs at first level—not second, as I'd suggested, upon reading the playtest copy of Bruce Cordell's *The Shattered Circle* (which comes out next month). First level would be fine with five or six characters, I thought, but we had only four.

Still, starting at first level has its charms, and it *was* a playtest. Things became tougher when I decided to be a stickler for the 3d6 method of rolling ability scores. Everyone in our group seemed to have some pronounced handicap. Chris played Ethan, a rather dim paladin (Intelligence 6). Jesse rolled a foolish (Wisdom 5) thief he called "Wrong-Way" Seth. Delaney, in homage to Dr. McCoy, made an infirm (Constitution 4) cleric named Leonard. Steve, math geek extraordinaire, named his foolhardy (another Wisdom 5) fighter Palindrome. The others, refusing to put up with nonsensical names, called him "Pally."

We didn't mess around with background or setting, and the group was in the dungeon within ten minutes. My hopes rose as I saw that these guys weren't at all daunted by doors. Seth must have listened, checked for traps, and opened fifteen or twenty doors within the first two hours. Doors were not their problem.

Pits were.

Out of five pit traps they encountered, they managed to fall into four of them.

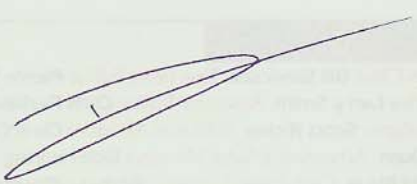
Six times.

You're probably wondering how anyone could be so stupid as to fall into a hole so many times. (Check out the pits article in this very issue if you need help coaxing your PCs into pits; I don't figure I'll need any help for months, maybe years, with this group.) I was wondering that myself. "How could you be so stupid?" I asked.

Sometimes the answer was obvious. Steve's character grew bored easily, controlling himself just long enough to let Jesse's character search one or two 10' sections of a room before charging ahead, heedless of the danger. At least he was consistent about it, playing Pally as a hyperactive and brash fighter. He was way out front in the falling-into-pits competition.

The trouble didn't end with the pit traps. Seconds after his nickname changed to "Lefty," I exclaimed to Jesse, "What were you thinking?"

"I've got a Wisdom of five!" he explained. "I wasn't thinking anything! I'm *role*playing."



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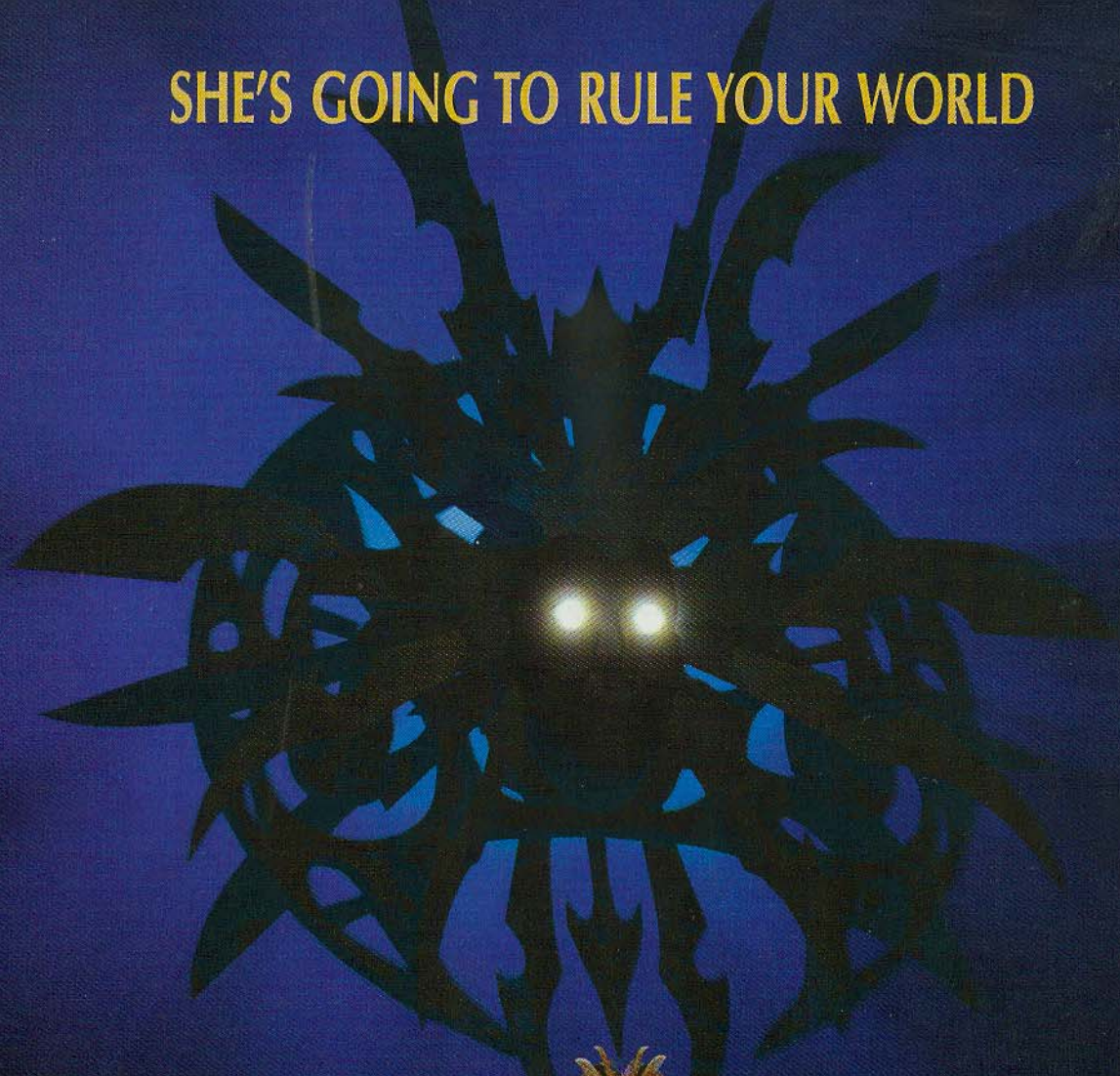

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Raves for Elves

I must say that I am very impressed with issue #251. I have been an AD&D® player for over 15 years and have perused many issues of *Dragon® Magazine*.

This is definitely one of the best. The many articles on Elvenkind were a delight. I especially appreciate the name generator and the character portraits. The artwork was fantastic, especially the title pages for "Magic of the Seldarine."

I also appreciate the fact that you provided both AD&D and Saga® stats in the dryad article. This is a practice that should continue in future articles.

I also appreciate the fact that you provided both AD&D® and Saga® stats in the dryad article.

Finally, I am very impressed with the overall format and feel of the magazine in recent issues. Your staff is doing a top-notch job providing a quality product for gamers and fantasy enthusiasts.

David Donohoo
San Marcos, TX

Best It's Been

First, I have to say that I think *Dragon Magazine* is at its peak, and yet every issue continues to get better. I just finished issue #251 and it seems like you packed enough articles for two magazines into one. Not that I'm complaining—I love it.

While I don't play in the Forgotten Realms® setting, I love Ed Greenwood's "Wyrms of the North." I thought the ideas presented in "Beyond the Tree" were new and interesting, and I'm going to try them out on my AD&D group. When I get a Saga group together, I'll run it by them too. I've really enjoyed the fiction in the last couple of issues, especially "The Lizard Shoppe." Talk about an original idea! But the real thing that inspired me to write has been the art. Lately, some great stuff has graced the pages of *Dragon Magazine*. I especially enjoyed the work by Rebecca Guay for "The Dimernesti" in issue #250. Then, in issue #251, she illustrated the "Magic of the Seldarine" and "PC Portraits." I thought I had died and gone to Mount Celestia.

One more thing I'd like to comment on is the Alternity® game in *Dragon Magazine*. I had thought at first that I would prefer it kept out, but "Sixguns & Sheseyans" changed my mind and inspired me to buy the basic books for the Alternity game. Still, I think one article per issue is best; leave the rest for great AD&D articles.

Simon Horton
Warren, NH
loup_de_noire@hotmail.com

Praise for PC Portraits

I was very pleased with the concept and execution of the "PC Portraits" column in issue #251. I look forward to future installments of this article and hope it provides work by a variety of artists.

I have been quite impressed with the recent quality of the art in *Dragon Magazine*. It seems that much more care is being taken to insure illustrations are new (not rehashed) and beautiful. The magazine's new layout is superb, and the recent articles have been filled with useful, interesting, and original information. For the first time in years, I find myself scanning the shelves of my local bookstore with anticipation, hoping to find the latest issue of *Dragon Magazine*.

Thank you for your time and a quality product.

Dino Sorrelle
Birmingham, AL

It's Not Cannon

Okay, shoot me for not being current, and welcome back *Dragon Magazine*!

That said, I have recently acquired *Combat & Tactics*, mostly to peruse the seige combat rules. Shock, horror, and dismay were my three initial reactions to the thought that it would take several months to batter through a castle's walls with a trebuchet. But I let it go—I can make my own rules about that.

Then I noticed that, while cannon are treated as magical weapons for the purposes of hitting things that are immune to normal weapons due to the size of their ammunition, catapults, trebuchets, and onagers are incapable of doing the same thing.

Say what?

Well, I was almost willing to ignore that as misinformation—the kind of rule that slips through the editing process. The mighty sage reinforced the idea in *Dragon Magazine* #247 (I told you I was behind) on page 20, at the bottom of the middle column. I ask again, say what?

People, a trebuchet was a *huge* instument of war, easily capable of hurling rocks the weight of a cow or a Yugo. Something with a 30,000-lb. counterpoise can generally be counted on to toss good-sized rocks a fair distance and with a great deal of momentum when they arrive on target. By "good sized" I am referring to something in the 50–75 lb. range—significantly larger than the "large" shot from a cannon. Catapults could easily toss a rock the weight of a cannon ball (or a cannon, for goodness sakes!) with a significant amount of force.

My complaint is that everyone seems fascinated with this gunpowder stuff. Yeah, okay—it's nice. I'll give you "nice." But the ranges on a bombard were normally a lot shorter than on a catapult or trebuchet, and the weight of the ammunition was smaller, in most cases, for a cannon than the others.

So let's get everyone on the same sheet of music—either let them all be treated like magical large ammunition for purposes of hitting, or don't allow any of them to be treated so. (Personally I'm in favor of allowing them, and I do in my campaign.)

By the way, *DRAGON Magazine* is amazing, and I'm glad you're back.

Greg Hazzard
Eden, NC
gkhazz@vnet.net

I'm Back!

It has certainly been a long time—eight years, I figure—since I've picked up a copy of *DRAGON Magazine*. I never stopped playing the AD&D game; I just stopped reading the magazine. The reason was simple: I didn't want to spend any more money on the game.

The release of the 2nd Edition was, originally, great. A lot of things were cleared up, polished, repaired, and made current. I bought the new books in the order I needed to replace the old ones, so the MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® book came first. I loved it, especially the way I could remove the monster sheets I needed for a particular session and put them in a smaller binder to use during play. Oh, it was beautiful, as if it had been designed by people who actually played on a regular basis.

But then it started to get weird. I bought a copy of *Legends & Lore* to replace my completely shot copy of *Deities & Demigods* (hey, I've been playing since 1978, okay?). What in the name of the gods was going on here? Avatars? Spheres of magic? Then came the new *Players Handbook* and *DMG*. Hold on, specialized wizards? Wild magic? I know, it's the AD&D game. You use what you like, pitch what you don't, and wing the rest, but things were getting more complex, not easier. Fighter kits, priest kits, etc. And then, talk of a 3rd Edition? *No way!* I was done. We would play with the rules and books we had, and be glad to have it. Then, last week, "Elven Deities" screamed out at me from across the bookstore. I bought it. I read it. I loved it. I'm back, and I'm getting the core rules to prove it. It was a good eight years, but I think my campaign needs some fresh ideas—and *DRAGON Magazine* is still the place to get the best.

I have to tell you, though, I laughed at how some things just *don't* change. Years ago, everyone was having a fit because *DRAGON Magazine* included articles about TOP SECRET®, MARVEL SUPERHEROES™, and other non-AD&D games. Now everyone's freaking about the ALTERNITY game.

DRAGONMIRTH™ was always one of my favorite sections. It still is. Although I miss Wormy and Snarf, "Knights of the Dinner Table" is *excellent*.

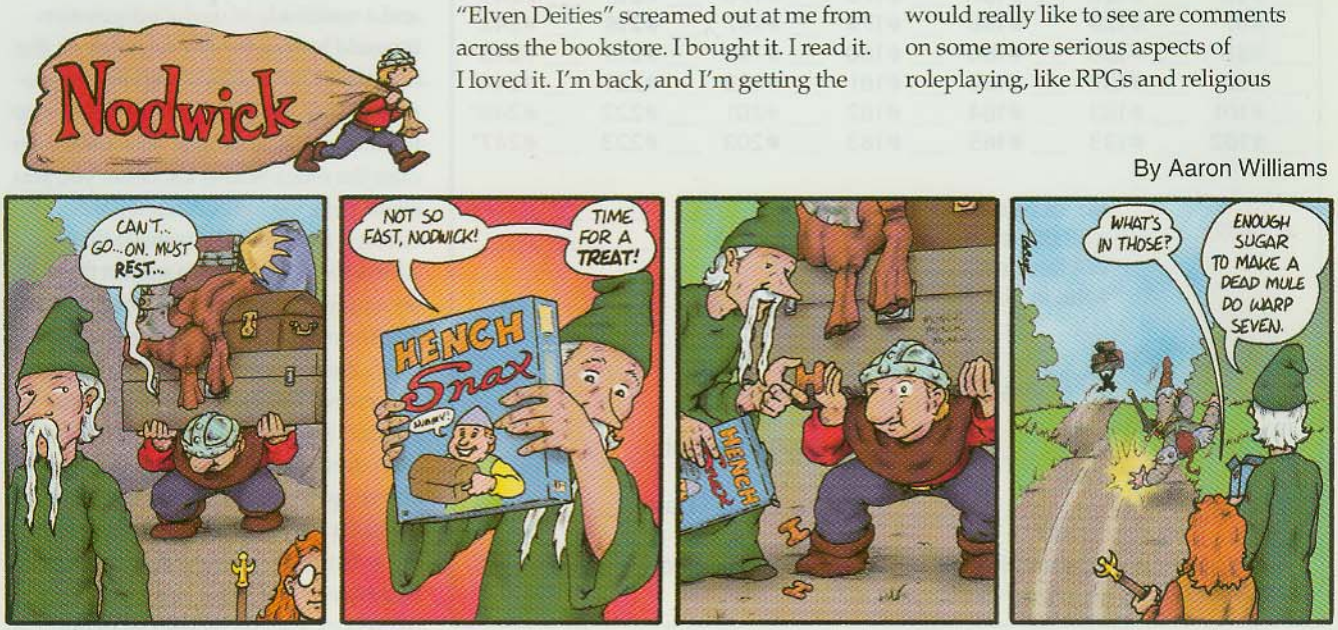
I guess when all is said and done, I missed you guys. Thank goodness the internet lets me get at some of those back issues I missed! Keep up the good work—and see you next month!

Maribeth Allison
Milwaukee, WI

Missing Links

I would like to respond to Jonathan M. Richard's article on missing links. His application of the term "missing link" is simply wrong: no currently living creature can be a link between two other recent creatures. Their ancestors could be, however. To illustrate: we are not descended from gorillas, chimpanzees or orangutans; we are descended from some ancestor of these apes.

Aside from that, I enjoy your magazine very much, even if it contains occasional ALTERNITY articles. Articles I would really like to see are comments on some more serious aspects of roleplaying, like RPGs and religious



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fundamentalist opponents, or violence in roleplaying games.

Perhaps these subjects could be discussed in "Forum."

The only feature of your magazine I don't like are the continuing comics, like "Floyd" and "Libram X." This doesn't have anything to do with the artists ("Nodwick" is great!), only with the fact that they seem out of place in *Dragon Magazine*, because they do not really concern RPGs. Also, the stories tend to be confusing. I noticed that I don't really miss these comics when you're not publishing any.

Thank you for a magazine that keeps improving!

Jonathan v.d. Sluis
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Questions

Greetings! I'm a fairly new reader of *Dragon Magazine*, and I have a few questions.

First of all, has the magazine staff ever given thought to publishing bound editions of several issues? Like *National Geographic*, for example. The idea would be to provide readers with back information without them having to search for back issues.

In issue #248, J.D. Sivyer references Adkinson's charts, cards, and situation dice. What issue can I find Adkison's piece in?

One last idea. I've noticed that *Dragon Magazine* is full of new monsters, spells, magical items, races, and a multitude of useful information. It would be nice to have an index for the magazine. While this would be a monumental task at first, keeping the index up to date would be simple. You could even offer the index online! Or, better yet, you could have the index created online! Create a form on your website that allows the readership to submit their own index topics from their back issues. The form could be set up to reject references that were ambiguous or already submitted. The reason for readers to submit? A contest of some kind, a random drawing taken from all of the valid entries, perhaps with some weight on the older issues. Since duplicate references would be rejected, readers would scramble to find more and more references, leaving us with an online

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catalog of *Dragon Magazine*! This not only saves the staff some work but also allows the readership to become more involved in production and even qualify for a prize — say, a free subscription or passes to the Gen Con® Game Fair.

Christian Tomsey
Milwaukee, WI

A bound facsimile of back issues sounds like a good idea, but the gnomes in our electronic media division have an even better one—a completely searchable facsimile of the first 250 issues of Dragon Magazine *(plus* The Strategic Review*) on CD-ROM. That includes the "Out of Character" article on henchmen from issue #246. Since the whole thing is searchable, it serves as its own index. Watch these pages for more information on this product, available in the spring of 1999.*

More Pictures & Names

I have been playing AD&D since I was in junior high school back in the early 80s. I have played in many different campaigns and read a plethora of different articles in scores of *Dragon Magazines* over the span of at least a decade. I have never been a subscriber but have always purchased the magazine at my local gaming store. I have introduced no fewer than a dozen people to the game and I have some long lasting friendships that have developed due to roleplaying.

I have been a player in several campaigns (the Forgotten Realms setting being my long-standing favorite), and I have even DMed a couple (including my own recent creation that I run over the net via email with friends who can no longer get together once a week on a regular basis—we all now have separate lives, and our schedules do not mesh).

The writer of "The Wyrm's Turn™" in issue #251 hits the piton on the head when he says "If you're like most people, you're better at writing characters than drawing them." I find the new feature of your magazine, "PC Portraits," extremely useful. It is one thing to say "my character has blond hair and a long slender face" and quite another thing to show a picture of that character. The old adage "a picture is worth a thousand words" is accurate in this case.

I am thrilled that I can offer my players these pictures to choose from for their own character descriptions. They can be (with permission!) cut and pasted onto their character sheets! I can use them as NPCs so that when they meet their nemesis Jond Remar the Shadowe, I can refer them to the appropriate picture instead of my paragraph-long description of him.

"PC Portraits" is the best idea I've seen in *Dragon Magazine* in ages, but what about color pictures? Not anything as extremely detailed as the cover art, but a little more than black and white line art would be fantastic! And what about more than one page? I realize that it is new, and you are probably going through some sort of trial period, but I have to say that more individual portraits would be better in this case.

Lastly, I would like to applaud the article "by any other name" by Owen K.C. Stephens. This is another thing that has been long needed in the AD&D game! I cannot count how many times I have been forced to come up with a name on the fly for an NPC encounter and have the character never taken seriously because his impromptu name sounded too strange. My only real question on this article is what can we do about other races? (Especially humans.) I would love to see a random naming system that worked for the other races also.

Kelly Nall
New Albany, IN

We purposefully made "PC Portraits" black & white, assuming that people would color the illustrations to suit their characters, but if we receive many requests for color, you've got it. (I suspect that black & white is better for photocopies, too.) Likewise with two pages, though I suspect that twelve issues of fourteen portraits each will give players plenty of choices very quickly. As for more name generators, Owen's working on them even now. What a deal for you!

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Which 1st-Edition classes, if any, should be restored to the core AD&D® game?

Big Advantages

I like giants. As a DM, however, I like to use them in a "creative" manner. Many of my players object to this, so I tend to stick to the basic boulder-and-bash techniques. While these tactics are all right, I feel the giants are just not as formidable as they should be. Why only one attack? I give them two or three, two fists and one kick, if the situation allows it. "You run up to the giant and cut his leg, but he just smiles and draws back his foot for a kick. Can you fly?"

Also, if something the size of a giant's fist or boot strikes a character, shouldn't there be more effect to the character than a loss of hit points? My system adds knockback effects. If a giant attacks in such a manner as to strike with a horizontal or upward swing, the object of the strike (if under the giant's weight allowance) is propelled away a number of feet equal to the giant's Strength points. This allows a giant to "throw away" its attackers without actually touching them by hand, granting that they have room for a swing. "Go for distance, go for distance!"

Since giants are so large, I think they should suffer less damage, not more, from weapons made to kill smaller opponents. A rule I use revises the damage for huge and greater creatures by their size categories. If a Medium (5'4") warrior strikes a Huge (22' tall) giant with a long sword and deals 10 hp damage, the damage is divided by 2, for a difference of two size categories, for a total of 5 hp damage. "You stab the giant a good one. 'Ow!' he rumbles, 'Darn bugs!'"

These are just a few rules that I have created to address the weaknesses of the giant races. I hope you will consider and enjoy them.

I know your players *won't*.

Ben Stiles
Ontario, Canada

SINCE GIANTS ARE SO LARGE, I think they should suffer less damage, not more, from weapons made to kill smaller opponents.

Experience Goals

Recently in "Forum," there have been calls for the next edition of the D&D® game to do away with experience tables and use a skill allocation system more like that of *Werewolf** or *Vampire**.

Ignore them!

The experience system is one of things that sets the D&D game apart from other games. However, it is currently not perfect. The answer lies within the pages of *DRAGON® Magazine* and the idea of the story award. Instead of adding every accomplishment of each PC, the DM should simply set an award value for completing story goals. Then, whether the players receive these awards depends on whether they achieve the goals. No longer must the PCs slay monsters to gain experience.

To use a stereotypical example, the players are faced with stopping an assassination attempt on the king. Success is worth 10,000 XP each. The players can simply kill the assassins, they can stage their own attempt (making sure that it will fail) and implicate the real assassins with it, or they can convince the king of the danger (having to outwit the king's advisor who is part of the attempt) and persuade him to change his plans. All of these will receive the same award, as long as they keep the king alive.

Just my thought on the subject.

Garett Kutcher
Gifu-ken, Japan

Another Dip Into the Grab Bag

I have just read Matt Wilson's letter from issue #251, and I still think the Alteration school is a "grab bag." According to his definitions, an Alteration spell can alter the way a person perceives the world … wait a minute … aren't Divination spells meant for that?

Detect evil alters the way one perceives the world, so it should be an Alteration spell? Also, Matt Wilson mentions that *vacancy* is an Alteration spell because it "alters the victim's perceptions." Spells that alter a victim's perception should be either Enchantment/Charm (think of *charm person, suggestion,* etc.) or Illusion (If you check the illusion spells in the *PHB*, you'll find that several of them alter the way a victim perceives the world or alters his perceptions.)

My opinion is that the Alteration school *should* be trimmed down to a selection of spells that really fit the word (e.g., *water breathing, fly,* and *polymorph self*), not spells that alter things in some twisted way (like *delude*, which alters the alignment aura but—and this is

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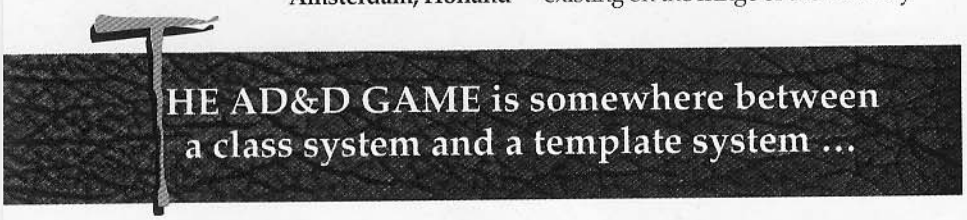
important—protects the recipient from alignment detection). Another reason is that the Alteration school is pretty powerful in the game. The Necromancy, Enchantment/Charm, and Abjuration schools have about the same amount of spells *together* as the Alteration has alone. Not only is it a splendid school for power players, but it is also "boring" if you choose to become a Transmuter.

And now a solution: As I have already written, clean it out! If the Alteration school still remains the largest school by far, you could decide to cut it in two parts. (For example, you could make one school that alters living things and one that alters nonliving things.)

One thing is certain for me, the Alteration school needs modification and clarification.

Derek Groen
Amsterdam, Holland



Upgrades

Allow me to state simply why I think a 3rd Edition of the AD&D game is essential: I don't use twenty-year-old computers.

About twenty-five years ago (give or take a couple), the personal computer was first invented. About fifteen years ago, my family brought an 8086 IBM PC. About ten years ago, my family bought an 80386 Gateway. About five years ago, we bought an 80486, and last year, I bought a Pentium 200.

Similarly, about twenty-five years ago, the D&D game came into existence. About twenty years ago, AD&D first went to print. About fifteen years ago, systems like *GURPS* and the Hero system were coming on the market for the first time. About ten years ago, *Vampire: The Masquerade* first came out.

Personal computers and roleplaying games both share an interesting trait: The reason we use them is not intrinsic to themselves, but what we use them *for*. I use a computer not because I need to use a computer but because I want to run a piece of software. I play an RPG not because I want to play an RPG but because I want to create a world of fantasy, science fiction, or whatever.

The quality of a computer is measured only in terms of its effectiveness to run software. The quality of an RPG, similarly, is measured only in terms of its effectiveness in creating worlds of fiction in which I can roleplay. Think of an RPG as a system and the things we do with an RPG (such as saving princesses and slaying dragons) as the software we run with the system.

This letter is in direct response to Leon Chang's letter in *DRAGON Magazine* #252 regarding the class-level system and why he believes it should still be present in a 3rd Edition. Over the past twenty years, we have seen the virtual disappearance of the class-level system from roleplaying games—with the exception of the AD&D game and a few games existing on the fringe of the industry.

Why should this nearly universal switch have taken place? The reason is simple: A skill system is better than a class-level system.

There are a host of reasons why. The best class system in the world limits the number of characters that can be played by the very definition of a class system, while the best skill systems allow you to build any character imaginable. Levels produce the oddity of characters who learn *everything*, all at once, or nothing at all.

Before elaborating, let me define a few terms:

Class System: Skills are grouped into packages. A single package of skills is selected at character creation, and no skills may be selected outside of the package.

Template System: Skills are defined into packages. A package of skills is selected at character creation, but other skills may be purchased.

Skill System: Skills are not grouped into packages. Each skill is selected individually at character creation.

Level System: All of a character's skills advance together.

Point System: A system in which each skill a character possesses may be advanced individually.

A few examples to make sure what I've said is clear: basic D&D was a pure class-level system. *Feng Shui*** is a pure template system (of which few exist). *GURPS* is a pure skill-and-point system.

The AD&D game is somewhere between a class system and a template system, as well as between a level system and a point system. I say this because, while the AD&D game does strictly curtail what skills a character can learn based on class, it also allows certain skills (proficiencies) to be learned in addition to class skills. The AD&D game, while being extremely close to a pure level system, isn't quite because there are ways of advancing individual skills by themselves. (Primarily I am thinking of the difference between having a weapon proficiency and a weapon specialization for fighters.)

Leon Chang suggested in his letter a plan to clear away a lot of the clutter in the AD&D 2nd Edition game system but didn't actually change much of the core system. In my mind this is an unsatisfactory way of proceeding—the core mechanic of the AD&D 2nd Edition game is essentially the same as that of the AD&D 1st Edition game, and that core mechanic is twenty years old and showing its age.

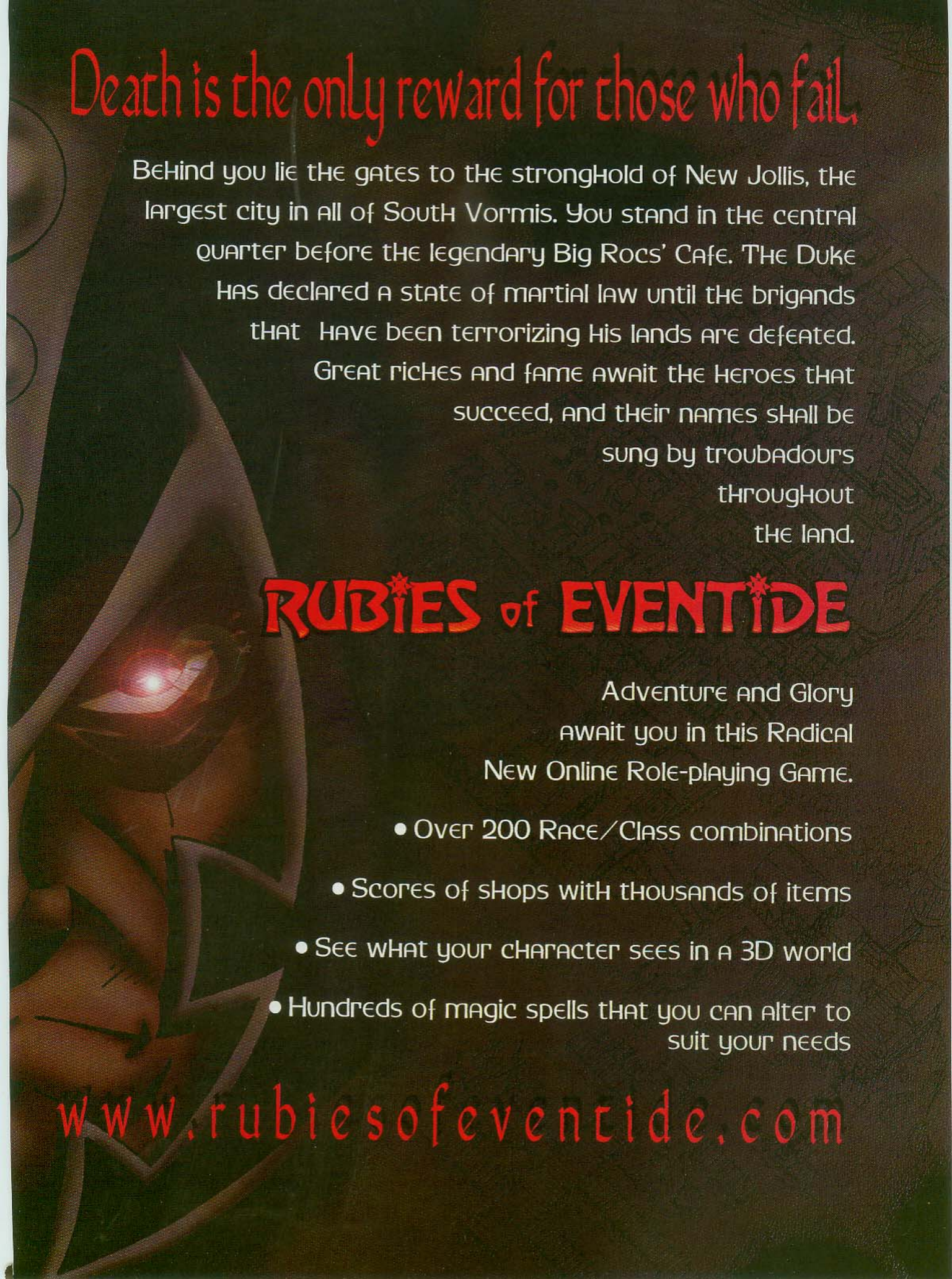
My suggestion is this: Move the AD&D game firmly into being a template system while finding a new and undefined middle ground between a level system and a point system.

To whit:

1. Combine class skills, proficiencies, and any other skill-like abilities into a unified skill system. All abilities should be defined in an identical manner so that inconsistencies between systems are eliminated. One should never have to ask the question, "If I want my character to learn X, should I make a new class, a new kit, or a new proficiency?"

2. Create four "Class Templates" (just call them "classes" in order to keep the feel of the system correct): fighter, cleric, mage, rogue. Each of these class templates will be defined as possessing a specific set of skills.

3. Allow the creation of "kits." Each kit would essentially be a template that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modifies the class template in specific ways. Kits that would be included with the core rules should definitely include the ranger, paladin, specialty priest, druid, specialist mage, and bard. Old favorites like the cavalier and monk could also make a reappearance.

4. Unify the skill progression system so that each skill can be advanced individually.

5. Create a level system that recreates the feel of the current level system, while using the skill progression system as its basis.

6. This has little to do with what has gone before, but there should be a method presented for *selecting* attributes, rather than rolling them (and the player should not be penalized for having done so by having the point total be lower than the average point total returned by a 3d6 or 4d6 spread). Character creation is about creating a character—sometimes it is aided by randomization, but other times it is silly to randomize attributes if a player already knows the character he wants to play.

This system accomplishes three things:

1. It maintains the ease of learning the D&D game. (Beginners are presented with a simple system of rolling attributes, selecting a class, selecting a race, and beginning play. More advanced rules, located elsewhere, give them the ability to customize the attributes and skills of their character.)

2. It allows those who want to keep it simple to do so easily. (There is no need to use the advanced rules unless you want to or need to create a specific character. If you don't need to, then you simply do what you've always done.)

3. It maintains the feel of the AD&D game while widely expanding the power of the game to let the player and DM play the type of game they enjoy.

The roleplaying systems of today allow you to do more in less time with fewer dice rolls and fewer chart references. The designers of today's RPGs have learned from the mistakes of the past twenty-five years. Since the D&D game first appeared they've improved the ways things are done. The AD&D game should do the same, while maintaining the feel and mood which makes it the AD&D game.

The desired solution is not one that leaves the AD&D game unchanged, for substantial improvements can be made. On the other hand, you do not want to change AD&D into something wholly different. I believe that, with changes like the ones outlined above, you can create a 3rd Edition that keeps the aspects of the AD&D game that make it great, while adapting the game to something that isn't ten years out of date.

Justin Bacon
Minneapolis, MN

ALIGNMENT SHOULD REMAIN in the AD&D game *only* as an aid to the DM.

Out of Alignment

In response to Greg Jensen's letter in issue #251 and the question of whether alignment should be "an absolute value or a subjective guideline," I suggest it *must* be a subjective guideline.

First, I agree with Greg that the lawful or chaotic component of alignment is more objective than the good and evil component, but it is not so simply determined as he suggests. Law does mean "following rules and promoting order" but whose rules? Should a lawful character follow the rules of his god, his family, his clan, his native government, the society of which he is currently a member, the society which he is visiting, or any guild or other organization of which he is a member? Law and chaos are not so clear. To highlight the point, consider a law that requires chaotic, disorderly behavior. What is a lawful character to do then?

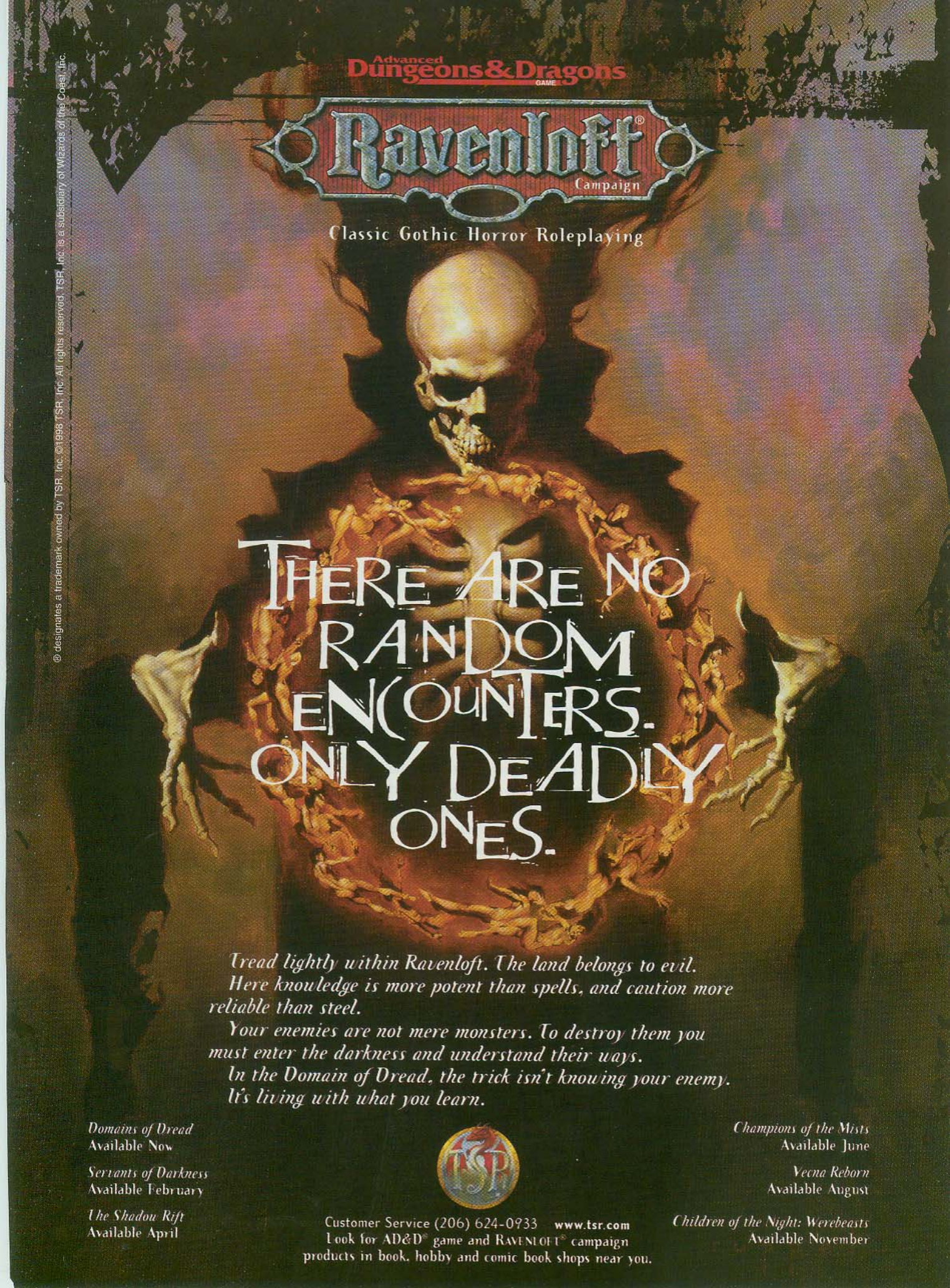
Second comes the much more difficult question of good and evil. Greg claims that there are two main theories of ethics. Regardless of the popularity of these theories, there are actually many more, several of which are much more convincing and logically sound. In fact, a strong argument can be made that good and evil cannot possibly exist. Of course, the rulebook could determine what theory of good and evil is to be used for alignment purposes, just as it could decide on what rules a lawful character should follow; however, the text required to satisfactorily cover these topics could fill a book much larger than any other AD&D rulebook ever made. Ultimately, does TSR want to determine the philosophies of player characters?

Putting all the debate of law, chaos, neutrality, good, and evil aside, the fundamental problem with alignment is that it is an internal attribute. Most people would agree intentions, not actions, are good or evil. The same could be said for law and chaos. A lawful good character is one who *tries* to obey laws and *tries* to do good. A DM can never see into the mind of a player's character. If that character was convinced that piercing the nymph through the heart would restore her to full health and end the plague that was ravaging the city, was that murder really an evil act?

Even if the DM is certain the player didn't believe that, isn't this a roleplaying game? Doesn't the player have the right to determine what his characters are thinking, regardless of what the player himself thinks? Yes, the above example is extreme, and hopefully, a player would want to roleplay a character with a consistent ideology, but many times I have seen a character take an action his player felt was consistent with the character's alignment, only to be told by the DM that he would lose experience or be stripped of his class as a result. This is why I find alignment to be the single greatest flaw of the AD&D game. Alignment should remain in the AD&D game *only* as an aid to the DM, to assist his roleplaying of monsters and NPCs. There should be no alignment restrictions on classes, and there should certainly be no ill effects of "changing" alignment. TSR has a choice for the AD&D game: it can use objective alignments with class restrictions and penalties for "change," or it can allow players to roleplay.

Personally, I like roleplaying.

Matt Locey
Gainesville, FL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Experience & Spellcasting

I would like to touch on the subject of a possible 3rd Edition of the AD&D game. I find that I agree with Dana Aquadro's letter (in issue #252) that it wouldn't be fair to us players to be forced to buy a new edition of the AD&D game and all its subsequent support products if substantial changes aren't made.

If a 3rd Edition must be made, I would like to see it turned into a skill-based system. I would also like to see the method for gaining experience points changed. As it stands now, the primary method for gaining experience points is by killing larger and larger numbers of larger and larger monsters, whereas playing in character, coming up with a good idea, successfully using a skill or special ability, and such have taken a back seat. I feel that this promotes a more hack-and-slash style of roleplaying and takes away from the deeper aspects of gaming.

> IF A 3RD EDITION must be made, I would like to see it turned into a skill-based system.

Another thing I want to see changed is the spellcasting system. I have never liked that a mage forgets a spell after casting it, and AD&D is the only game I have found so far in which this occurs. I prefer a spell-point system in which each spell costs a certain amount of spell points to cast and a mage doesn't forget a spell every time he casts it.

To finish up, I would like to say a few things about the SAGA® system used in the DRAGONLANCE® FIFTH AGE® game. While I enjoy playing it, I have found some serious problems with the system. First, spells are too costly for a spellcaster to cast, limiting him from a few spells to maybe ten in one day depending on the relevant ability score. This brings up another problem, which is that, against all but weak opponents, a spellcaster with a high score in his Reason or Spirit attribute has a difficult time casting spells effectively. I have not tried this yet, but I shudder to think of what trouble a spellcaster with a low score in one of these attributes will have casting spells. It seems to me he would be forced to await the elusive trump card to cast a successful spell against all but the weakest opponents. I have also found that it is much more difficult for a party to survive—much less defeat—monsters that, in the AD&D game, they would be more evenly matched against. Against large foes, such as giants, a party must be well equipped with magical weapons and armor.

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Dueling Scholars

I'm writing in response to the letter written by Gregory W. Detwiler in issue #252 concerning weapons. He was addressing my letter in issue #250 on the subject. Mr. Detwiler claims that I did not do proper research for my letter; I would like to refute this point. As stated in issue #250, I am a professional armorer and weaponsmith, with 17 years experience of reenacting battles. I have two decades of research experience as well, reading and owning many books on arms and armor.

Mr. Detwiler pointed out that one of the Osprey books classified the Dacian falx as a two-handed sword. I am well aware that several authors (in books that I own) classify the weapon as a sword, but in my opinion it fits into classification more closely as a polearm. It has quite a long grip (about as long as the blade), and the weapon probably originated as an agricultural billhook. The billhook polearm resurfaced during the Middle Ages. At the very least you could call it both polearm and sword (it's a question of semantics). As to the issue of chopping off pikes with swords or axes, I have done tests concerning this myself. I've learned in simulated battles that if you stop to try and cut at pikes gathered before you with a two-handed sword, you will be quickly stabbed by those pikes.

It is such living history tests and experience (and not just reading speculation in books) that lead me to believe that the pike-head hacking Landesknechts are a myth. Halberdiers and two-handed swordsmen used in support of pikes would be used to rush up past the enemy's pike heads, closing with them and fighting them in a much safer fashion. This rushing technique is also illustrated in the second "Chivalry" book by Funcken.

In addition, I feel that Mr. Detwiler really gave a bad assessment to the medieval crossbowman and longbowman. He felt that most knights were leery of letting their own base peasants get their hands on weapons that were good at penetrating armor. Though this might have been the opinion of some knights, it is well documented that England had laws (made by nobles) requiring peasant yeomen to own longbows and practice with them. The English longbowman was well valued by his country, and integral to England's success in many battles.

The French at first scorned the longbow, but due to English success, were forced to adopt it. I did heartily agree with Mr. Detwiler's assessment of combined arms being the key to success on the battlefield.

So, I have indeed done my research, and will gladly furnish Mr. Detwiler with a bibliography if he wishes one. (A partial bibliography follows).

Ancient Period: *Greece and Rome at War* by Connolly, *The Legionary* by Connolly, *The Cavalryman* by Connolly, *The Roman Army from Caesar to Trajan* Simkins and Embleton.

Medieval: *Arms and Armor of the European Knight* by Edge and Paddock, *Longbow* by Hardy.

Joe Piela
Tallahassee, FL

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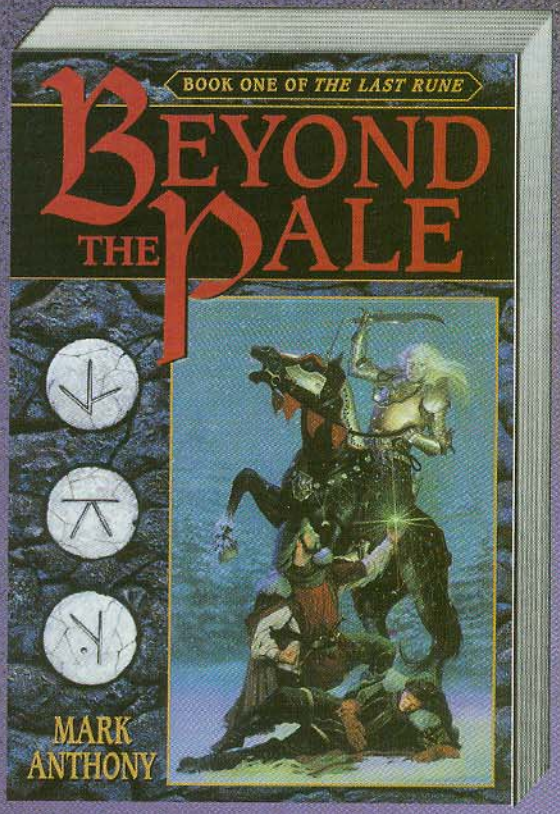

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By Skip Williams

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This month, the Sage considers some ins and outs of the AD&D® game's magic jar *spell, then probes some mysteries arising from a few magical items and optional rules.*

SAY A CHARACTER CASTS *MAGIC JAR*, enters the body of someone else, then destroys both her original body and the receptacle that holds the life force of the host body.

Say a character casts *magic jar*, enters the body of someone else, then destroys both her original body and the receptacle that holds the life force of the host body. Would the host body effectively be the caster's body? If the caster (in the host body) was killed, and a *resurrection* or *raise dead* attempt were made on the body, would the caster come back to the host body? If not, is there any way that the wizard can ever permanently claim the body as her own, so that magic could return her life force to the body in question?

A *magic jar* spell allows a character to transfer her life force from her own body to the receptacle used in the spell, then from the receptacle to another body. If a host body is slain while a *magic jar* caster occupies it, the caster's life force must return to the receptacle. The caster dies along with the host body if the recept-acle has been destroyed, is out of range, or is unavailable for any other reason. It makes no difference what happened to the caster's original body because, without the receptacle, the caster's life force cannot move to another body. Not even an *amulet of life protection* can save the caster's life.

A *magic jar* user is never more than a squatter in the host body, and any number of things can dislodge her (see the next question). If a slain host body is brought back to life, the host's original life force is restored. If the original life force has been irrevocably slain (perhaps by being within a *magic jar* receptacle when it was destroyed), the attempt to bring the body back to life fails.

It might be possible to lay permanent claim to a host body. A carefully worded *wish* might do the trick, though using a *wish* for this sort of bodysnatching is most unfair (almost as unfair as *wishing* the original occupant were dead). Such a *wish* exposes the user to whatever adverse consequences the DM can dream up. It certainly is possible to research a spell that allows permanent transfers of life force or to create a magical item to do so. Both of these options are likely to be difficult and dangerous to create and even more perilous to use. Powerful spellcasting characters are best advised to use *clone* spells, *potions of longevity*, and the like to keep themselves healthy rather than looking for new bodies to steal.

Suppose a character uses a *magic jar* spell to take over another body and decides to stay awhile. Can the character avoid the nasty side effects of casting certain spells, like the unnatural aging from a casting a *wish* or Constitution loss from casting *permanency*, just by switching bodies? Are there any special restrictions that apply to the character when occupying a host?

The side effects from casting a difficult spell represent damage to a character's whole being, not just his body. Such penalties stick with him wherever he goes, even when they seem purely physical. For example, if a character "borrows" a body and then casts a *permanency* spell, he'll find that any body he occupies suffers the Constitution loss.

Any number of special restrictions might apply to a character in a host body. If the body is fairly similar to the character's own body, he probably won't notice anything unusual right away.

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If the host body is the same general type but much larger or smaller, the character might find himself a trifle uncoordinated or confused at first. Even fairly routine activities, such as eating or getting dressed, might take a little longer. Complex activities, such as spellcasting, might require a Dexterity or Wisdom check (or both) at a substantial penalty.

If the host body is significantly different (say a human occupying a centaur's body). The character might suffer a movement penalty and be unable to perform any complex task. In a short time, such a character might become incapacitated thanks to the cumulative effects of too many minor accidents, improper diet, insufficient rest, and a host of other problems. In any case, the character must spend some time (and maybe even a proficiency slot), learning how to use and take proper care of the host.

No matter what type of host body the caster invades, he'll have to be wary of spells such as *dispel magic* and *dispel evil*, which can drive him from the host body. The character/host counts as an enchanted creature for purposes of spells such as *protection from evil* and *antimagic shell* and will find himself hedged out by these effects. The character radiates Enchantment/Charm magic, and spells such as *detect magic* and *detect charm* reveal this. A *true seeing* spell reveals the caster's life force. The DM is free to decide exactly what the spell reveals; *true seeing* might simply detect an odd ripple in the host's aura, or it might show the invading character's visage superimposed on the host.

The newest psionics rules (from the revised DARK SUN® box and the *Skills & Powers* book) change Contact from a power to a proficiency. What happens to the Passive Contact power (from *The Will and the Way*)? Is it still a devotion, or does it also become a proficiency?

If Passive Contact is made permanent through the Psychic Surgery power, how is the cost for Passive Contact paid?

Passive Contact is still a power; a psionicist uses it by establishing contact, then successfully beating Passive Contact's MAC (I suggest 9). Thereafter, the psionicist who initiated the power pays 1 PSP per hour to maintain the contact.

If Passive Contact is made permanent with Psychic Surgery, there is no PSP cost for using it (but the surgery itself has a cost based on the target's level).

WHEN [A *STAFF OF THE SERPENT*] becomes a python, can an *animal growth* spell still affect it?

I'm using the rules for making armor and weapons from the *Complete Fighter's Handbook*. How do I find the number of apprentices and overseers it takes to forge the different types of armor introduced in the *Combat & Tactics* book? Also, how do I figure out what it takes to make only a piece of armor? For example, how much does it cost to replace the plate mail arm a fighter lost from an ogre's critical hit?

Pages 6 and 7 of the *Complete Fighter's Handbook* explain how to calculate building times for new armor types. Just start reading under the Time to Craft Armor heading. To calculate the time and cost for a piece of armor, find (or figure) the total cost for the suit and multiply by the ratio of the piece weight over the full weight. For example, a chain mail arm weighs 4 lbs., and chain mail's total weight is 40 lbs. (40 ÷ 4 = 10), so the cost is about 3.8 gp (round up to 4), and it takes about 2 apprentice days to make.

The *Tome of Magic* says a wild mage has a 50% chance of controlling a *wand of wonder*, allowing her to use charges from the wand (one charge per level of the spell being cast) to cast any spell she already knows. When a character does this, what level do you use for the level variations table? The caster's true level, or 6th (wand) level? What is the initiative modifier for a spell cast this way? If the spell allows a saving throw, which column on the saving throw table do you use?

For the level variations table, use 6th level or the caster's level, whichever is lower.

Use the normal casting time (and initiative modifier) for the spell.

Use the wand column on the saving throw table unless the saving throw priority rule (see *PHB*, Chapter 9) specifies a different one.

The material about equipment damage from page 129 of the *Spells & Magic* book says there's no need to check every piece of equipment of the character if he suffers a critical strike from a spell; one just has to roll saves for items on the location struck. Fine for me, but if a character fails his saving throw vs. an area-effect spell, say *fireball*, without suffering a critical strike, which pieces of his equipment will have to make item saving throws?

Just use Table 47 from *Spells & Magic* whenever someone fails a save vs. a whole-body attack (such as a *fireball*) even if no critical strike occurs. The table gives the number of locations the attack affects the most strongly. Roll item saves only for the locations actually "struck." This approach has the virtue of saving time during play, even if it doesn't mesh with the general rule for item saving throws in the *PHB*.

The description of the *staff of the serpent* (python) leaves me with four burning questions. First, what is the staff's THAC0 when it is trying to attack? Second, it says a victim who is hit is trapped until he dies or the python is dead. Does this mean the person cannot break out? If the trapped creature can break out, should I use one of the procedures from the snake entries in the MONSTROUS MANUAL® book to resolve the attempt? Third, how does the staff work when the opponent can be hit only by magical weapons? What happens to the staff's ability to hit these types of opponents when it's taken into the planes? Finally,

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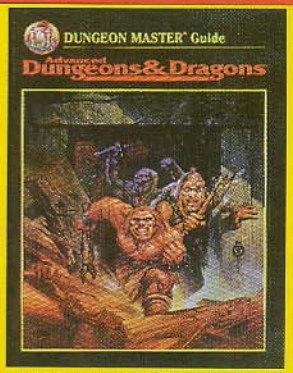

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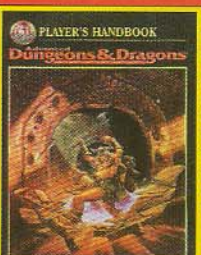

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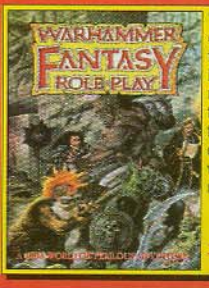

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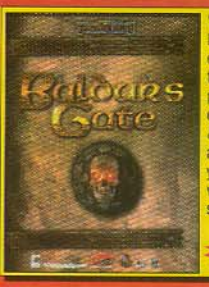

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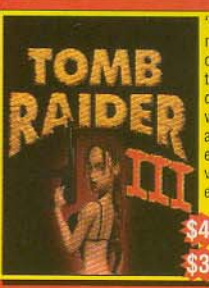

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Table 1: Proficiency Summary

Proficiency	Group*	Cost (Slots/CPs)	Relevant Ability	Ability Modifier/ Initial Rating
Astral Combat	W, R	2/5	Intelligence/Reason	0/8
Astral Navigation	W, Wi, P	2/4	Intelligence/Reason	–2/6
Astral Running	G	1/2	Intelligence/Reason	—/—
Astral Tracking	W	2/4	Wisdom/Intuition	0/8
Project Thoughts	G	2/4	Intelligence/Reason	–2/6
Read Spellshadow	Wi	1/3	Intelligence/Reason	–2/6
Sense Emotion	G	1/3	Wisdom/Intuition	–1/7
Stewardship	G	1/2	Wisdom/Intuition	0/8
Statecraft	G	1/2	Charisma/Leadership	0/8

* W=Warrior, R= Rogue, Wi= Wizard, P= Priest, G= General

when the staff becomes a python, can an *animal growth* spell still affect it?

When using the staff as a weapon, use the wielder's THAC0. When thrown to the ground, treat the staff as a creature with 10 hit dice (THAC0 11).

When the staff twines itself around a creature, the only way to break free is to destroy the staff (a creature can't just unwrap itself as it could with a real snake).The entwined victim cannot move and is treated as a grappled opponent (see *PHB*, Chapter 9).

In the hands of a character, the staff is a +2 weapon. The bonus is subject to the rules on planar location (which are neatly summed up on page 111 of the *Planewalker's Handbook*). In python form, the staff functions as a +4 weapon with regard to the creatures it can hit, thanks to its 10 hit dice (see Table 48 in the *DMG*). This is not subject to planar distance.

When in python form, the staff is a creature, and spells affect it accordingly. Whether the staff is an "animal," and subject to an *animal growth* spell, or a monster is up to your DM. I'd suggest treating it as a normal, albeit large and strong, snake (and subject to *animal growth* and any other spell that affects snakes).

I'd like to use the new proficiencies from both the *Guide to the Astral Plane* and *Charlemagne's Paladins*. Neither of these books lists costs or relevant skills for the proficiencies. Also what would these proficiencies look like under the proficiency system in the *Skills & Powers* book?

The information on the proficiencies appears in **Table 1,** above.

Note that Astral combat requires a roll only if the character tries to maneuver for advantage. Most of the time, the skill simply negates the normal penalties for Astral combat (–2 to missile attacks). Likewise, Astral running boosts the character's movement rate in the Astral Plane to six times his Intelligence score (maximum of 96).

AN A *DETECT MAGIC* SPELL help locate an invisible foe?

Can a *detect magic* spell help locate an invisible foe? If so, what sort of effect will be visible to the caster?

A *detect magic* spell picks up any magical aura in its area of effect (a 10' path that can be used to scan a 60-degree arc each round). The spell might indicate the *invisibility* effect itself (if it is magical) or a spell effect or magical item the invisible creature carries. Since the *detect magic* caster cannot see the subject, she sees nothing. The caster knows, however, that there's something magical somewhere in spell's area of effect.

The spellcaster could move around and try to determine the creature's exact location, but if the invisible foe is on the move, too, the effort probably won't yield any useful results.

If a psionicist is *feebleminded,* do any powers that he is currently maintaining shut off? If so, this would prove quite dangerous to a psionicist who had absorbed a large amount of damage with Kinetic Control.

A *feeblemind* spell reduces the recipient to the mentality of a moronic child. The recipient can move, communicate in a simple fashion, eat (if provided with food), and sleep and that's pretty much it. Using psionic powers—even maintaining them—is beyond the recipient's mental capacity until the *feeblemind* effect is removed. A power being maintained stops working at the beginning of the first round in which the maintenance cost is not paid.

Table 10 in the *Complete Book of Humanoids* says a pixie character's base starting age is 100 years, with a variable of 5d6 years. Table 11 (on the same page) says that middle age for pixies is 100 years. Do all pixies start at middle age? If so, do they receive the additional +1 to Intelligence and Wisdom and -1 to Strength and Constitution for being middle aged?

The pixie listing on Table 10 is wrong. The correct starting age for a pixie PC is 25 + 5d6 years.

I'm inclined to suggest not adjusting a character's ability scores for age when a character starts play. Your DM might have other ideas, however.

Skip Williams is fond of telling people he's older than he looks, which may or may not have influenced his answer to this month's closing question.

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The most anticipated and talked about release in Games Workshop history is here – the 3rd edition of Warhammer 40,000. In the 41st Millennium there is no time for peace, no time for respite for mankind must battle for survival or face final annihilation at the hands of merciless aliens, foul mutants and gibbering daemons!

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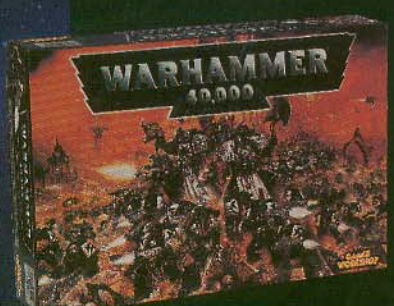

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NEW CREATURES CONTEST!

Beastly Research

Letter to the Royal Society of ADVENTURERS & EXPLORERS!

From the desk of:
Sir Tomas Stuart Reginald
HM Minister of Research

RE: A Request for Professional Assistance!

Greetings to My Fellow Explorers,

I beg your indulgence. I am in dire need of aid from this honored society to complete my most recent assignment.

I have recently been commissioned to produce a comprehensive catalogue of creatures, heretofore unrecorded, from the myriad worlds of the cosmos. But, dash-it-all, my advancing age and illness prevent me from embarking on any lengthy safaris. So, I am appealing to the brotherhood of all Adventurers to assist me in compiling this compendium.

I ask you to share your tales of unknown abominations, bizarre beasts, and curious creatures encountered during your adventures. You will be of great assistance to a fellow explorer and Their Majesties, and your discoveries may even merit inclusion in my publication if of sufficient veracity and entertainment value. I am sure I can count on each of you.

Right then, here are the details of your assignment ...

Gratefully yours,
T. S. Reginald, Esq.

Dragon® Magazine

Big Game Hunters Sought!

Make your mark on TSR's Adventure Games!
This month's featured contest is a killer; TSR is looking for new creatures! We want creatures that no one has faced before; something so subtle, so terrible, or so alien that its likeness has never before graced a TSR product. We want you to tell us about the unique creatures that haunt the lands of your personal campaigns! And we want creatures that can be used in each of TSR's featured rule systems: the ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®, ALTERNITY®, and SAGA® games.

HAVE WE GOT PRIZES!
The designer of the winning entry for each rule system will win a signed copy of the AD&D® *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Annual Volume 4*, the ALTERNITY® *ALIEN COMPENDIUM*™ Accessory, and *The Bestiary* for the DRAGONLANCE®: FIFTH AGE® game! TSR, Inc. also reserves the right to present the winners in an issue of *DRAGON® Magazine*.

WHAT ARE THE PARAMETERS?
Length: Please limit each entry to **750 words**. Longer entries cannot be considered.

Game format: Each entry must be submitted in at least one of the approved creature formats for the ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, ALTERNITY, or SAGA games.

Style: Each entry will be judged on the creativity and entertainment value of its narrative.

Game balance: Each entry should strive for game balance—each creature should present an interesting challenge with individual strengths and vulnerabilities that may be exploited. Toughness and the ability to deal extraordinary damage are not necessarily the attributes the judges will key on.

Description: The creature narrative text should describe the appearance, abilities, traits, culture or animal family structure, and other details, such as its psychology and combat tactics. Each description should provide sufficient interesting background around which entire adventures may be written. The judges are looking for creatures that have distinct character and monstrous aspects.

Form: Entries must be typed, double-spaced, with one-inch (1") margins at top, bottom, left, and right. Entries may be mailed to *Beastly Research Contest*, c/o *DRAGON Magazine*, P.O. Box 707, Renton, WA 98057–0707.

JUDGES
Each entry will be judged by members of the TSR design team. Entries will be scored on professional presentation, creativity, originality, style, dramatic value, and game balance.

DEADLINE!
All entries must be postmarked no later than **January 15, 1999**.

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1. Entry: To enter, send your completed entry form including your name, address, phone number, the contest to which your submission applies, and your proposed Creature or Description ("Entry") to TSR, Inc. ("TSR") *DRAGON Magazine* Beastly Research Contest, P.O. Box 707, Renton, WA 98057-0707. No purchase required. You may submit as many entries as you wish, but only one Entry per submission. There is no advantage to submitting the same entry more than once. Entries may not exceed 750 words in length. If you are under 18, you must have your parent's permission to enter. Entries must be received before midnight (Pacific Time), January 15, 1999. Winners will be selected by a team of TSR judges based on the Entry's format, originality, and appropriateness. All decisions are final. The probability of winning is based exclusively on the quality of the Entries received.

2. Originality of Entry: All Entries must be in English. Entrant warrants that the Entry written above is the original and exclusive work of Entrant, and that Entrant has not assigned, transferred, licensed, or sold the right to use the Entry to any other party. Entrant agrees to indemnify TSR against good faith claims of copyright infringement based on TSR's use of the Entry, but such indemnification shall not apply if it can be shown that Entrant had no access to the allegedly infringed work.

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"Beastly Research" Contest

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PC Portraits

Giant Slayers

by David Day

About drawing giant slayers, David Day writes, "Where else can I work on a beautiful street-smart thief, a wild bearded dwarf, a lovable forest gnome, a crusty pirate, and a half-ogre all on the same page?" As for his roleplaying experience, he admits, "All my attempts ended with my character's death!"

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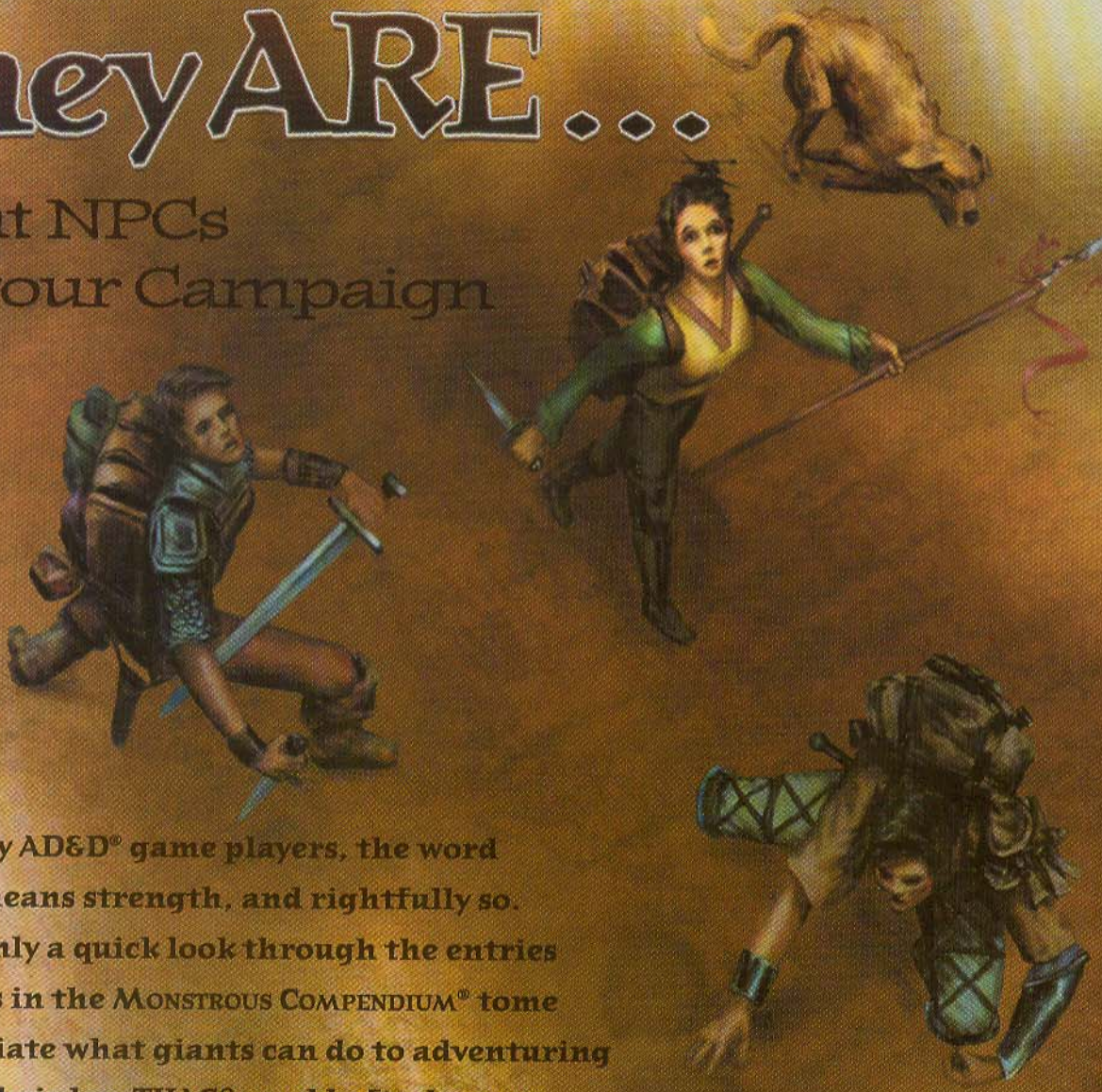
The BIGGER They ARE...

Giant NPCs for your Campaign

by Skip Williams

illustrated by Stephen King



To many AD&D® game players, the word "giant" means strength, and rightfully so. It takes only a quick look through the entries for giants in the MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® tome to appreciate what giants can do to adventuring parties. Their low THACOs and hefty damage bonuses allow them to reduce lesser creatures to pulp in short order, even in missile combat.

But, hey, many types of giants are pretty smart, too. Even a community of the hopelessly bone-headed giant types might produce a brainy individual once in a while. Consider turning an old stereotype on its head and introducing some giants with character and a few tricks up their sleeves, such as the ones presented here.

Armach, Hill Giant Rogue

Armach resembles a huge orc, with his ruddy complexion, stooped shoulders, and long arms. He wears a studded leather jack, leather helmet, and sturdy boots, all dyed black. He carries a massive crossbow, a slim (by hill giant standards) club, and an assortment of ropes, picks, and grapples.

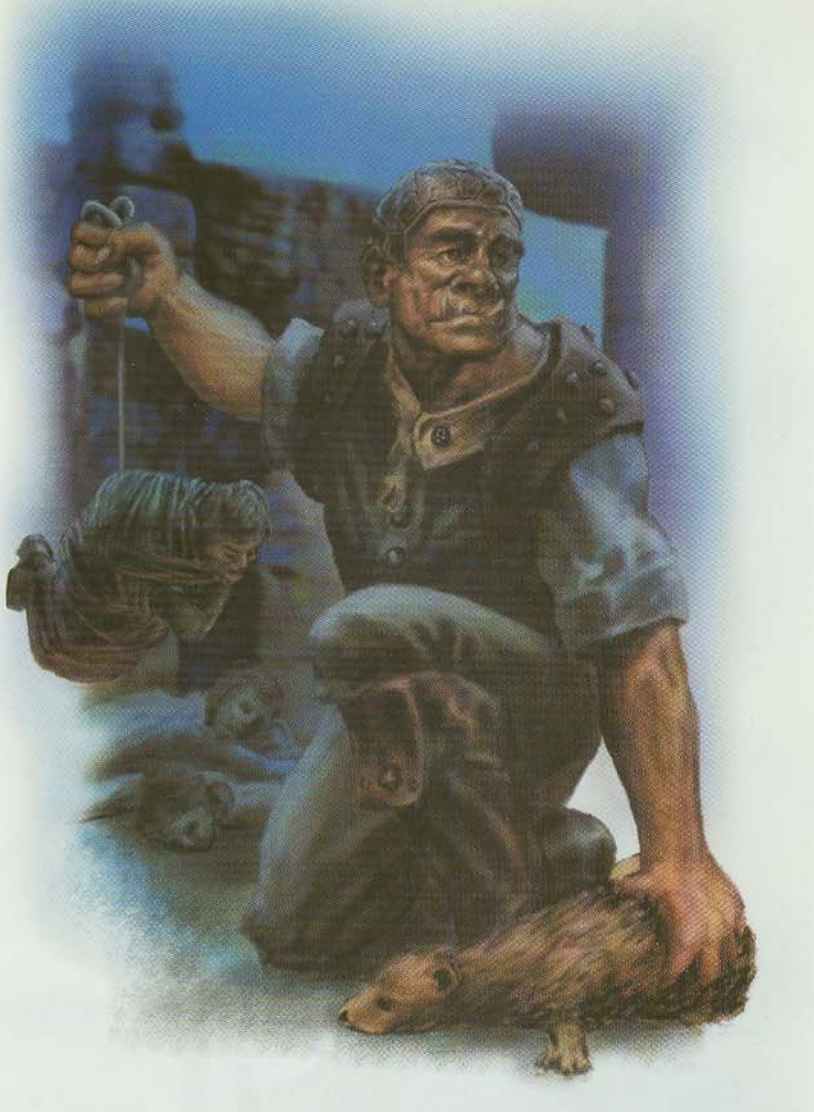
Armach once helped capture a group of adventurers infiltrating his family's home. The young giant became curious about "sneaking" as a way to get things. While guarding the group, Armach let the party's thief talk him into a hiding lesson in the countryside. The thief hid so well Armach never did find him.

Fairly quick-witted as hill giants go, Armach is not too wise (though he was canny enough not to go back home after losing a prisoner). Once on his own, Armach tried hard to become an adventuring thief. His early attempts at picking pockets were laughable but effective. (Many victims were quite satisfied to let the ham-handed giant have their purses.) Over the years, Armach has managed to master a few thiefly tricks, but he still tends to use his formidable strength when all else fails. Armach can hide in shadows or heavy undergrowth, move silently, and climb walls. He can backstab (actually a wallop from behind with his club) for triple damage.

Today, Armach controls a cave complex with four other hill giants, plus his mate and three children. A tribe of orcs serves the group. Armach keeps a giant weasel, Fetch, as a pet.

After trying dungeon delving, banditry, and even a little burglary, Armach has established himself as a mercenary of sorts. His specialty is scaling castle walls in the dark of night, swiftly dispatching guards, and throwing open the gates for his employers. He's willing to take on any similar task, so long as the location is not heavily populated. Armach's typical fee for the break-in is 2,000 gp and two pinches of *dust of disappearance*. Thoroughly evil, Armach attacks at the drop of a hat if he thinks a potential employer is too weak to resist. He's also not above turning coat if offered a bribe at least as large as his initial fee (though few enemies are wise enough to try that ploy).

Armach's favorite tactic is to approach a castle wall silently just as the moon sets. Once over the wall, he slays any guards he meets as quietly as possible, often using his *rope of entanglement*. If detected, he uses Fetch and his golden lions to create a diversion and becomes invisible with *dust of disappearance*.



Using Armach: Player characters might happen to be inside a castle Armach has been hired to attack. Chasing down the invisible giant shouldn't be too difficult for an experienced group, but they'll probably never look at giants the same way again. PCs might also find themselves outside an enemy castle when Armach appears on the scene, perhaps hired by an NPC or perhaps to offer his services. Someone who wishes to secure Armach's services might hire the PCs as intermediaries. In either case, the PCs must negotiate with the shifty giant to avoid a fight.

Armach (Hill Giant): AC 1 (studded leather armor, Dexterity); MV 12; HD 12 + 1–2; hp 60; THAC0 9; #AT 1 or 1; Dmg 2d6 + 7 (oversized club and Strength bonus) or 2d8 (hurled boulder); SA hurling boulders, thief abilities; SD catch large missiles; SZ H (15' 7" tall); ML elite (16); AL CE; XP 5,000.

Ability Scores: S 19, D 15, C 16, I 9, W 8, Ch 10.

Thief Skills: HS 40%, MS 65%, CW 90%, Backstab ×3.

Notes: Hurled boulders have a minimum range of 3 yards and maximum range of 200 yards. Can catch similar large missiles 30% of the time.

Special Equipment: Four boulders, *rope of entanglement, dust of disappearance* (5 pinches), *figurines of wondrous power, two golden lions.*

Fetch, Giant Weasel: AC 6; MV 15; HD 3+3; hp 18; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 2d6 (bite); SA hangs on after a successful bite, automatically inflicting 2d6 hp damage each round; SZ S (3' long); ML elite (14); INT animal (1); AL N; XP 175.

Tuall, Cloud Giant Engineer

Tuall has sky-blue skin and brass-colored hair. When working, he wears canvas knee britches and a leather apron. A loop on his trousers holds a massive hammer. Pockets in his apron bulge with the tools of his trade: trowels, levels, picks, prybars, and measuring cords. When traveling, apron and tools go into a portable hole, along with other supplies, and Tuall wears a cloak of midnight blue and a huge silver pectoral studded with pearls and opals. He owns a magical morning star, but he keeps it hidden in a cloth wrapping unless he's expecting trouble.

Tuall suffered through a discontented youth as the third son of a prosperous family. He was not treated badly, but his family constantly chided him for spending hours staring dreamily down from the cloud where his parents' castle stood, wondering what lay below. When not studying the ground, Tuall studied his parents' sprawling cloud castle. He had always been fascinated by the castle's superb construction and had resolved to become a great builder when he came of age. His ambitions did not please his parents, who considered his interest in the ground a waste of time and his desire to become a builder to be far below his station. When he came of age, he left home without hesitation. The move infuriated his whole family (who believed young Tuall had simply closed his mind to their good advice), but Tuall has never looked back.

Tuall is now the owner and chief engineer of the Tuall Construction Company. His employees include three stone giants (the brothers Roddel, Yurii, and Esko) and a human transmuter named Emil. The brothers assist Tuall with the heavy work, and Emil serves as the group's accountant and negotiator as well as Tuall's personal assistant. The company's base is a modest mountaintop castle permanently surrounded by billowing clouds. Tuall has been experimenting with the art of building cloud castles, but hasn't quite managed it yet.

When working on simple tasks, such as stone cutting or trench digging, the quartet can do the work of 24 men. For more complex tasks, such as building walls or towers, the quartet can do the work of 30 men. Their typical fee is 100 gp a month for the team, plus expenses (see sidebar), and a flat fee of 1,000 –10,000 gp, depending on the job. For big jobs, Tuall locates and recruits additional giant laborers (usually neutral stone giants) for a fee of 100 gp per giant, plus 20 gp a month per giant, plus expenses. Each of these giants can do the work of four men, no matter what the task.

Using Tuall: Player characters are most likely to encounter Tuall when his group is traveling to a job site. Once he accepts a commission, Tuall is careful to obtain letters of safe conduct from every ruler along his route, and he always chooses paths that skirt heavily populated areas—Tuall knows that most common folk panic when they see giants coming.

A party might simply blunder into Tuall's group, or PCs might be hired to guide him to a work site. Characters who interfere with Tuall's work not only must deal with a group of angry giants but also eventually must face the wrath of his employers as well.

Tuall (Cloud Giant): AC 0 (no armor) or –3 (*cloak of protection* +3); MV 15; HD 16 + 2–7; hp 95; THAC0 5; #AT 1 or 1; Dmg 6d4+14 (oversized *morning star* +3 and Strength bonus) or 2d12 (hurled boulder); SA hurling boulders, spell-like abilities; SD catch large missiles; SZ H (23' 8" tall); ML fanatic (17); AL NG; XP 10,000.

Ability Scores: S 23, D 13, C 17, I 12, W 12, Ch 14.

Spell-like Abilities (as 12th-level

caster): *levitate* own weight +2,000 pounds (3/day), *fog cloud* (3/day), *wall of fog* (1/day), *solid fog* (1/day).

Notes: Hurled boulders have a minimum range of 3 yards and maximum range of 240 yards. Can catch similar large missiles 60% of the time.

Special Equipment: Five boulders, *portable hole, morning star +3, cloak of protection +3, horn of blasting.*

Roddel, Yurii, and Esko (Stone Giants): AC 0; MV 12; HD 14 + 1–3; hp 77, 75, 72; THAC0 7; #AT 1 or 1; Dmg 6d6 + 8 (oversized club and Strength bonus) or 3d10 (hurled boulder); SA hurling boulders; SD catch large missiles; SZ H (abut 18' tall); ML fanatic (16); INT average (8–10); AL N; XP 7,000 each.

Notes: Hurled boulders have a minimum range of 3 yards and maximum range of 300 yards. Can catch similar large missiles 90% of the time.

Special Equipment: Boulders (6 each).

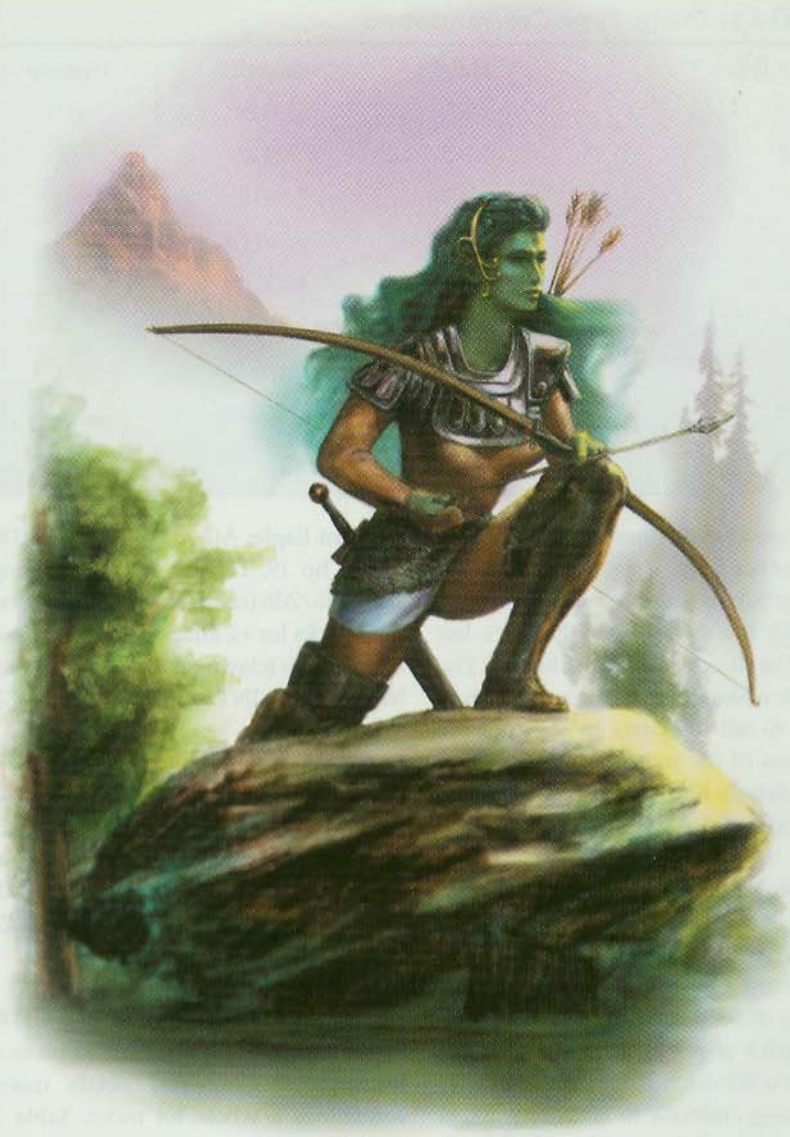
Emil (Male Human Transmuter 14): AC 1 (*bracers of defense AC 4*, Dexterity bonus); MV 12; HD 10+4; hp 29; THAC0 15 (13 with *staff of power* or *dagger of venom*); #AT 1 or 3; Dmg 1d4+2 (*dagger+2*) or 1d4/1d4/1d4 (dart); SA spells, opponents suffer a –1 saving throw penalty vs. Emil's alteration spells; SD gains a +1 saving throw bonus vs. alteration spells, and an additional +3 bonus to saving throws against effects that can be dodged (from Dexterity); SZ M (5' 10" tall); ML average (8); AL NG; XP 7,000.

Ability Scores: S 8, D 17, C 13, I 17, W 9, Ch 15.

Spells (5, 5, 5, 4, 4, 2, 1, plus one extra Alteration spell per spell level): *burning hands*, cantrip*, color spray *, comprehend languages, feather fall*, unseen servant; bind, detect invisibility, irritation*, Melf's acid arrow, pyrotechnics*; fireball, haste*, slow*, suggestion, tongues*, wind wall; dimension door*, improved invisibility, fire shield, Otiluke's resilient sphere*, polymorph self*; cloudkill, hold monster, telekinesis*, transmute rock to mud, wall of force; disintegrate*, mass suggestion, true seeing; reverse gravity*, teleport without error*.*

* Alteration spell

Special Equipment: *Bracers of defense AC 4, wand of conjuration* (27 charges), *alchemy jug.*



Elhena, Storm Giant Hunter

Elhena is a statuesque female with light green skin and emerald hair. She wears a brown leather tunic and matching hose. Links of bright chain mail peek out from the hem of her tunic. A pair of shiny black boots, a broad sword, a quiver of arrows, and a massive long bow complete her kit. Elhena travels with a giant eagle and a pack of blink dogs for company.

Elhena lives with her husband and three children in a mountaintop castle. The couple employs no servants, and Elhena doesn't much care for housework, so she spends most of her time roving around the base of her mountain, hunting and keeping a wary eye out for hostile monsters. Hubby seems able to keep things in order reasonably well without her.

Elhena has befriended a number of rangers and druids, and even a pair of silver dragons. Nothing much happens within a hundred miles that Elhena does not know about. The giantess can be a real terror in battle, especially when she employs her magic arrows and *boots of striding and springing*. Local elves and humans refer to thunderstorms and other loud natural occurrences as Elhena's tantrums and to small ponds and lakes as Elhena's footprints.

Using Elhena: Player characters are most likely to meet Elhena when passing near her lair. The giantess keeps an eye on any armed group moving through her territory. She's well aware that most smaller folk are afraid of giants and gives any group who seems hostile one (and only one) warning to calm down before attacking.

Table 1: Giant Type Comparisons

Giant Type	Height	Weight	Upkeep	Equip. Cost	Equip. Weight
Ogre	7'	300 lbs.	×1.5	×1.25	×1.25
Wood	9.5'	700 lbs.	×3	×1.5	×1.5
Ettin	13'	5,200 lbs.	×3	×2	×2
Hill	16'	4,200 lbs.	×5	×3	×2.5
Stone	18'	4,800 lbs.	×5	×4	×3
Frost	21'	7,700 lbs.	×6	×5	×3.5
Fire	18'	13,800 lbs.	×6	×6	×4.5
Cloud	24'	11,500 lbs.	×7	×6	×4
Storm	26'	14,600 lbs.	×7	×6	×4.5

Dwarves and gnomes are favorite targets for her bow.

A group trying to secure a guide through the area around Elhena's lair might be directed to Elhena herself. The person making the recommendation is likely to tell the party to seek out the huntress of the mountain and give no other details. Elhena serves as guide for the modest fee of 100 gp a week.

Elhena (Storm Giant): AC –8 (*chain mail* +4); MV 15 Sw 15; HD 19 + 2–7; hp 110; THAC0 3; #AT 1 or 2; Dmg 6d4 + 12 (oversized broad sword and Strength bonus) or 3d8+12 (composite long bow and giant sheaf arrow); SA spell-like abilities; SD catch large missiles, water breathing, immune to electricity; SZ G (25' 9" tall); ML fanatic (18); AL CG; XP 14,000.

Ability Scores: S 24, D 14, C 18, I 13, W 14, Ch 16.

Spell-Like Abilities (as 15th-level caster): *levitate* own weight +4,000 pounds (2/day), *call lighting* (3 bolts of 15d8 1/day), *lightning bolt* (1 bolt of 15d6 6/day), *control winds* (1/day), and *weather summoning* (1/day)

Notes: Bow has a range of 300 yards. Can catch large missiles 65% of the time.

Special Equipment: *Chain mail* +4, 15 sheaf arrows, 5 *arrows of lightning* (generates a 20-hp-damage stroke of lightning on impact, as a *javelin of lighting*), *boots of striding and springing.*

Giant Eagle: AC 7; MV 3, Fly 48 (D); HD 4; hp 19; THAC0 15; #AT 3; Dmg 1d6/1d6/2d6 (claw/claw/bite); SA diving attacks for +2 attack bonus and double damage (claws only); SZ M (5' tall); ML elite (13); INT animal (1); AL N; XP 175.

Blink Dogs (7): AC 5; MV 12; HD 4; hp 18 each; THAC0 16; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 (bite); SA blinking allows rear attacks 75% of the time; SZ M (4' long); ML steady (12); INT average (8–10); AL LG; XP 270 each.

Equipping and Feeding Giants

A giant's basic needs are the same as a human's—a giant just needs more, sometimes a whole lot more. **Table 1** gives equipment and upkeep costs for ogres and several different types of giants. Figures for height are taken from the MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® tome. The weight figures are derived from the so-called cube rule.* The numbers represent typical values for each race.

The **Upkeep** entries reflect the increased food intake and general higher cost for keeping a large humanoid fed and clothed. Just take the standard *PHB* cost for rations or monthly upkeep and multiply it by the number given.

The **Equipment Cost/Weight** entries show how expensive and heavy giant equipment is. The cost multiplier for equipment of suitable size if obtained from a human or demihuman artisan (you can use this multiplier for the construction time, too). This reflects the cost of extra material and labor. Use the standard values from the *Player's Handbook* as a base. Note that if the artisan is about the same size as the giant who uses the item, he can complete the item in the normal time and the only cost increase will be for extra material (which is the same as the weight multiplier). Note that giant equipment is somewhat lighter, in proportion to the user's weight, than human equipment is. This is because an 18'-long giant's sword might be three times longer than a 6'-long human's sword, but it is not three times wider and thicker.

If you wish to find out the weight for a giant not listed on **Table 1,** you can do the calculations yourself (as explained in the footnote below), or extrapolate it from a similar creature on the list. Reef giants, for example, are about the size of hill giants.

Upon close interrogation, Skip Williams admits to being one of the "kobolds" involved in creating issue 13's "How Heavy is my Giant?" article.

* According to the cube rule, when something gets larger, its weight increases by an amount equal to the cube of the increase. That is, if you make a brick twice as large in all three dimensions, its weight increases by a factor of eight (2 × 2 × 2 = 8). Most of the weights for giants presented here are based on a typical AD&D human (6' tall, 180 lbs.). The ettin and fire giant figures are based on a typical AD&D dwarf (4' 1" tall, 155 lbs.), and the hill giant is based on a 225-lb. human. For example, to calculate the storm giant's weight, start by dividing 26 (height of the giant) by 6 (height of an average human in feet) to figure out what the factor of increase is: (26 ÷ 6 = 4.333). Cube that (4.333 cubed is about 81), and multiply by 180 lbs. (81 × 180 = 14,580 lbs, rounded up to 14,600 lbs.). Of course, if you start with a skinnier or stockier human (or dwarf, or elf), your final results will be different.

Longtime *DRAGON® Magazine* readers might want to compare my numbers with the results from the seat-of-the-pants method used in "How Heavy is My Giant?" in issue #13.

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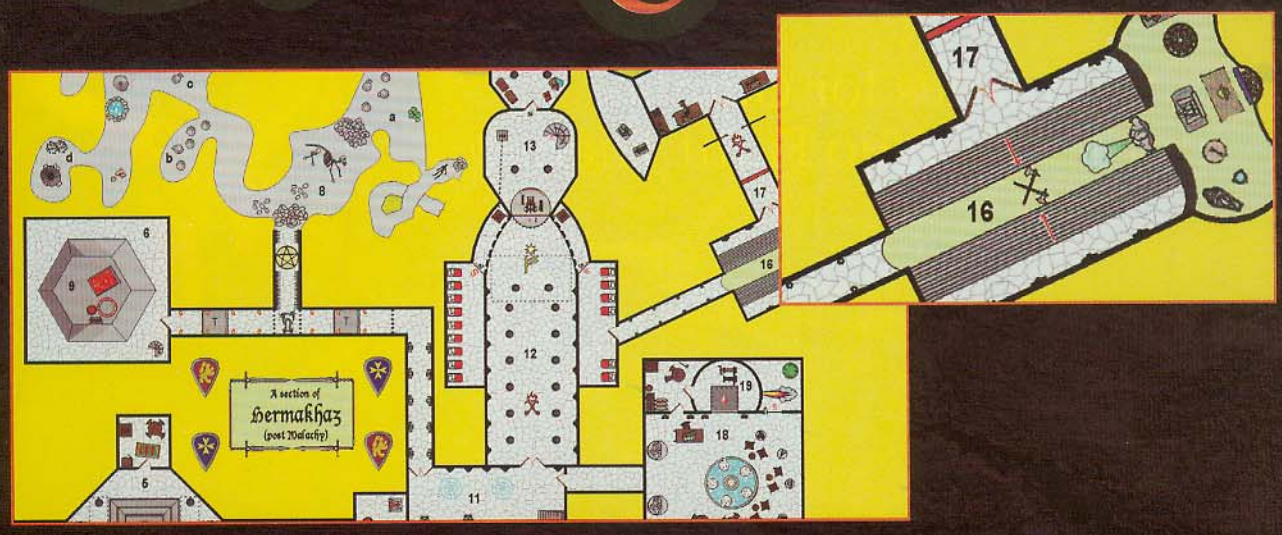

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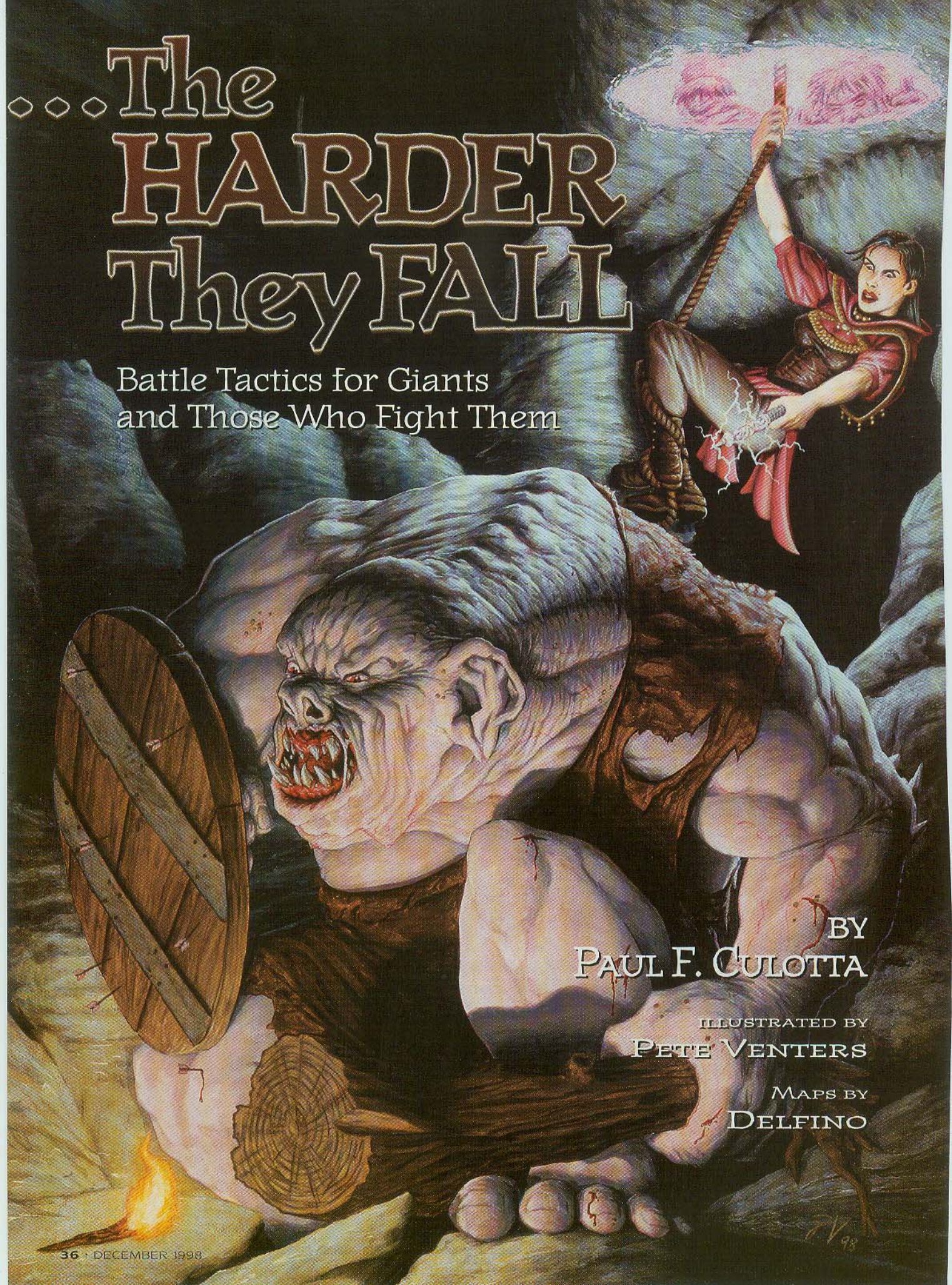


...The HARDER They FALL

Battle Tactics for Giants and Those Who Fight Them

BY
PAUL F. CULOTTA

ILLUSTRATED BY
PETE VENTERS

MAPS BY
DELFINO

Giants are tough opponents, but with experience, smart heroes can develop tactics to overcome the giants' advantages. Many of these powerful creatures are cunning if not particularly brilliant, however, and they have their own tactics to fend off treasure-seeking heroes.

The first part of this article is for the DM, while the second part is for the players. Each half includes tactical suggestions and dirty tricks to bring the other side down. No warranty is made as to how well any of these tips work; going into giant territory is dangerous business, and even the most clever heroes are sometimes unlucky.

For DMs Only

Players who value the pleasure of being surprised by a foe should skip to page 40 for advice on countering the following tactics and dirty tricks for DMs who employ giant opponents. Don't worry; the player's section is full of tips that should help keep the big fellas guessing.

Guaranteed Elbow Room

Giants fighting in constricted terrain aren't very effective. If fighting space is too tight, only one or two giants can swing a weapon. Meanwhile, the enemy's wizards target the giants with spells of mass destruction. For this reason, giants generally avoid fighting in narrow passages, defiles, forests, jungles, and other places where vegetation, terrain, and other obstacles hamper their ability to bring maximum attacks on their opponents.

Giants should strive to draw adventurers into a large open area where all giants can close and attack. Melee combat, after all, is the giants' greatest strength (See **Table 1**), and if giants can just close with their enemies, they can inflict serious harm. If giants find themselves drawn into restricted terrain, they might simply withdraw to an open area. After all, adventurers usually come looking for giants, rather than the opposite, so it is smart to battle them in a large cavern or wide field.

Sic 'Em!

There are few things in a giant's life more annoying than dwarves and gnomes. They are hard to kill because of their hardy constitutions, generally decent

Table 1. Giant Melee Attacks

Giant	Usual Melee Weapon/Dmg	Multiplier	Strength/Dmg Bonus
Cloud	Morning star/2d4	3×	23, +11
Cyclopskin	Club/1d6	1×	18/76, +4
	Bardiche/2d4		
	Spear/1d6		
Cyclops	Bardiche/2d4	2×	21, +9
Desert	Spear/1d6	2×	19, +7
Ettin	Right hand—club/1d6	3×	20, +8
	Left hand—club/1d8	2×	19, +7
Firbolg	Sword/1d10	1× (one-handed)	19, +7
		2× (two-handed)	19, +7
Fire	Sword/1d10	2.5×	22, +10
Fog	Club/1d6	3×	23, +11
Fomorian	Club/1d6	2×	20, +8
Frost	Axe/1d8	2×	21, +9
Hill	Club/1d6	2×	19, +7
Jungle	Club/1d6	2×	21, +9
Mountain	Tree limbs or logs/1d12	2.5×	22, +10
Reef	Trident/1d6+1	2.5×	22, +10
Stone	Club/1d6	2×	20, +8
Storm	Sword/1d10	3×	24, +12
Verbeeg	Spear/1d6	1×	18/51–18/00, +3 to +6
Voadkyn	Sword/1d10	1×	18/01–18/00 +3 to +6

Note: Like the other charts in this article, this one blends the information found in the MONSTROUS MANUAL™ tome and in the *Giantcraft* accessory. At times, the data in the two works is inconsistent, and the charts use the best parts of both works. For giants not covered in *Giantcraft* (cyclopskin, cyclops, jungle giant, reef giant), new data is provided. DMs who wish to stick solely to the MONSTROUS MANUAL or *Giantcraft* are free to do so.

Usual Weapon: The weapon that the giant normally wields and the damage it inflicts (as defined by the *Player's Handbook*). If the giant uses a different weapon, use the damage listed for that weapon in the *PHB*.

Multiplier: Used to multiply damage after the weapon damage is rolled.

Strength/Damage Bonus: Defines the giant's base Strength and the damage bonus as a result. The base Strengths given are for adult giants. The DM has the discretion to decrease Strength and base damage for juvenile, old, or weaker giants. Note that the giant does not receive an attack bonus for his Strength, as his THAC0 is defined by his HD.

Example of Using the Chart: Gorbash, a cyclops, detects Rollins the thief snooping around his sheep pen. He swings at Rollins with his bardiche and hits. For damage, the DM rolls 2d4, obtaining results of "3" and "2" for a total damage of 5. He uses the multiplier (×2) to increase this to 10. Finally, he adds the Strength bonus of Gorbash (+9) to come up with 19 hp total damage. Ouch!

Table 2: Giants and their Allies

Giant Type	Animal Companions/Other Allies[1]	Dragon Allies[2]
Cloud	Mountain lair: spotted lions, owlbears, griffons , wyverns (E) Cloud lair: griffons or hippogriffs	Cloud
Cyclopskin	1d4 gas spores, 1d2 giant weasels	None
Cyclops	1d4 cave bears, behir (20% chance)	None
Desert	Fire lizards, rocs, enormous insects, skeletal steeds, or stone mounts (see *MM*/134 for details).[3]	Brown, blue (E), Yellow (E), brass (G)
Ettin	Cave bears, orcs, goblins	Green
Firbolg	1d6 giant boars (60% chance), druid (50% chance)	Copper
Fire	Hell hounds, salamanders, fire elementals, 2d10 rothe (40% chance), 2d6 firedrakes (25% chance)	Red
Fog	4d8 grimlocks (30% chance), 1d4 displacer beasts (10% chance)	Black (E), silver (G), mist
Fomorian	1d8 giant beetles, 1d4 ropers, 2d6 carrion crawlers, 1d2 gorgons, 4d12 troglodytes	Deep
Frost	Winter wolves, yeti, remorhaz, 1d6 mastodons (50% chance), 1d6 smilodons (20% chance), 4d10 krotter (70% chance)[4]	White
Hill	Dire wolves, ogres, giant lizards, verbeeg, trolls	None
Jungle	Giant dragonflies, 1d3 elephants, humans (tribesmen), elder serpents	Green
Mountain	Ogres, trolls, hill giants, giant goats, 1d6 manticores (25% chance)	Copper
Reef	1d12 dolphins or 1d4 killer whales (50% chance of either, but not both)	Bronze, topaz
Stone	Cave bears, polar bears, giant goats, or 1d12 black bears (35% chance)	Amethyst, cloud
Storm	Rocs, griffons, sea lions	Silver, cloud
Verbeeg	Ogres, hill giants	None
Voadkyn	Wood elves, dire wolves, or both; treant (10% chance)	Faerie

1. Includes any nondragon allies or companions the giant might have. Where % chances and numbers appear, this is new information. If the chart mentions a type of animal or companion without numbers, the reader should consult *MM* for specific information.

2. The chart reflects only the most probable type of dragon ally a lair of giants may have. The dragons listed in the chart are those that live in the same type of terrain as the specified giant and that are closest in alignment. Thus, a desert giant would probably have a brown dragon as an ally, since it is neutral (with evil tendencies) and lives in arid regions. Yet it is not out of the question for the DM to postulate that a group of desert giants have allied with a blue dragon when the circumstances are right. Note also that, in some cases, the giants are not allies but vassals of the dragon. A good example of this would be a deep dragon with fomorian giant slaves guarding its lair. The chance of a giant being allied with a dragon is 20%. In some campaigns where there is long-lasting enmity between dragons and giants (e.g., the FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign, as explained in *Giantcraft*), the chance may be far less or nonexistent.

3. The unique mounts used by desert giants should follow the guidelines of the MONSTROUS MANUAL for similar creatures. Enormous insects should generally follow the guidelines for a giant beetle. Skeletal horses should be similar to giant skeletons, and stone mounts should resemble a camel-like stone golem. In each case, the creatures should be no fewer than 8 HD.

4. Krotter are yaklike creatures native to arctic terrain. Their statistics are: INT animal (1); AL N; AC 3; MV 6 (15 when stampeding); HD 4; THAC0 17; #AT 3; Dmg 1d4/1d4/1d3; SA Stampede; SZ L (6' at shoulder); ML 10; XP 120. They are fully detailed in *Giantcraft*.

(E) indicates that the choice applies only to evil giants; (G) indicates that it applies only to good giants.

strength, hatred of giants, their armor, and their inborn ability to avoid the giants' blows (–4 attack penalties).

Practically all giants have animal or monster companions of some sort. Presumably, these creatures have received some degree of training from the giants. It follows that this training includes commands or signals to attack specific opponents ... like short adventurers.

Imagine dwarven fighters gleefully rushing over to hack away at a stone giant's kneecaps. The giant snaps his fingers, and several cave bears burst from a side passage to protect their master, just as they have been trained. Cave bears (or other animal companions) suffer no attack penalties against short PCs, and while they deal with the dwarves, the giants are free to pound other adventurers into mush. Even if the animals lose, chances are good that the dwarves are weakened, and the giants can finish them off. There is little more satisfying to a giant than a roasted dwarf sandwich or gnome pie. **Table 2** summarizes typical animal companions and other allies—including dragons—typically found with giants.

Down and Dirty

Another good antidwarf trick involves ordinary pits. The pits are dug as deep as the giant's waist and are plainly visible. When the short heroes rush up to fight, a giant merely jumps into one of these pits and swings away.

What are the advantages to standing in a pit? First, by reducing its height, a giant eliminates the necessity of awkwardly bending over to smack smaller-than-man-sized targets, reducing the –4 attack penalty to –2. Second, with half its body in the pit, the giant now has 50% cover; a strict DM can rule that attackers have a –4 attack penalty. A more generous DM might rule that even with the pit there is still a lot of giant to hit, reducing the attack penalty to –2 or –1. Finally, the giants are not sticking up like sore thumbs attracting every elven archer and halfling slinger in sight. They can use the rushing attackers to mask missile attacks from the enemy's ranks.

There is one big disadvantage to this tactic; heroes might withdraw so that they can attack the giants with spells and

missile weapons, and it takes the giant a full round to climb out of the pit. Smart giants, however, keep an ample supply of boulders in their pits for peppering adventurers, especially those that wield magic.

Figure 1 shows a typical giant fighting position.

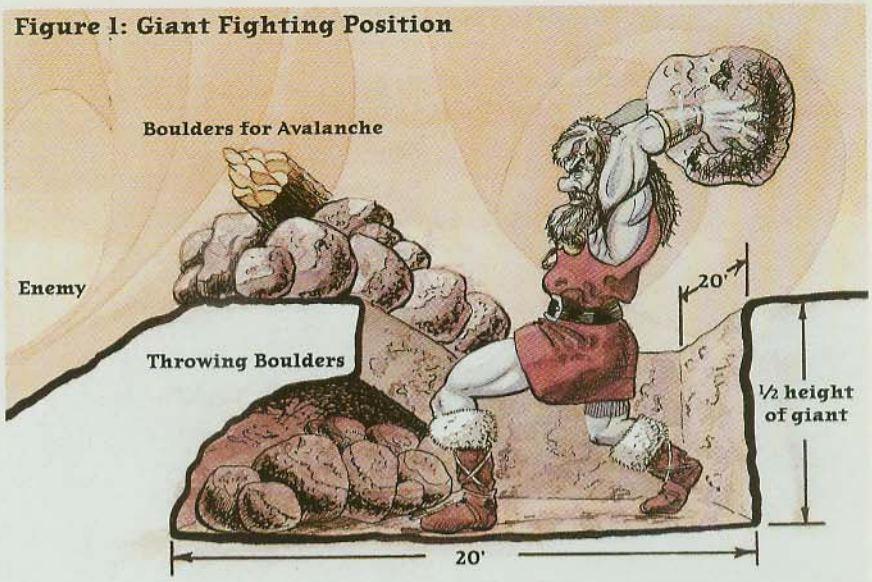
Squashing Spellcasters

These cowardly weaklings are nearly as repulsive as dwarves and gnomes because they generally stand back from real combat and work their destructive magic with spells, wands, rings, and so forth. Nothing can break up a giant's defensive position like these hateful beings. Thus, the priority is to take them out first.

One method of dealing with spellcasters is to designate at least two giants (more if available) to lob boulders, shoot ballistae, or cast other missile weapons at wizards and priests. The missile wielding giants must be spaced apart so that no area-effect attack takes all of them out at once and so that they can sustain a continual barrage. **Table 3** summarizes the missile capabilities of the various giants.

One new useful weapon is the beehive ballista missile (**Figure 2**) developed by the fire giants of Mount Brimstone. The ballista fires group of 15 javelins bound together and shot all as one missile. The binding is a thin iron band that releases the javelins after 40 feet of flight to form a deadly cone that can tack just about any wizard to the wall. A typical giant ballista crew is trained to measure the distances from the ballista to certain target points so that adjusting the mechanism to rain javelins upon the wizard's actual location is an easy matter. Hitting the target requires an attack roll vs. AC 10, modified for magical protection and the Dexterity of the target. Each target in the cone is struck by 2d6 javelins for 1d6+1 hp damage each. Obviously the missile is especially useful against wizards who caper about with *stoneskin* or *mirror image* spells. Beehive ballistae manned by giants have the following ranges (in yards): 10/60/120/195. They require a crew of two giants to operate. A trained crew may fire once every four rounds; untrained crews require eight rounds.

Figure 1: Giant Fighting Position



Another tactic is to fight fire with fire. Many giant lairs have a shaman or witch doctor who can remain hidden with the specific purpose of finding and targeting enemy wizards with his spells (or runes, if the rune system in *Giantcraft* is used). All a giant shaman needs is a small portal through which he can see the battlefield and cast his spells. This can be an underground fighting position, a large group of boulders, or even a giant stalagmite. Note that the shaman, depending on the cover he uses, should have some degree of protection from enemy attacks (Table 44, *DMG*).

The most effective tactic is often the most obvious: maneuver toward enemy wizards and priests and pound them into butter. If giants are fighting in open terrain, this should not be a problem. If in constricted terrain, it is a sure bet that warrior PCs form ranks to protect their spellcasters. To counter this tactic, giants should prepare a secret, hidden way around the adventurers' expected attack. A hidden passageway, a trail through the woods, or a concealed mountain pass all can work. If the heroes face a water-breathing giant (such as a storm giant, or one with *water breathing* cast upon him), the passageway can even be a river under which the giant swims unseen. Once the maneuvering force works its way along the secret route to the enemy's rear, it pounces on and clobbers the cowardly wizards and priests.

Such a force can be especially effective if one of the giants previously had a *silence 15' radius* cast on him by a giant shaman. Not only does this enhance the

Figure 2: Beehive Ballista Missile

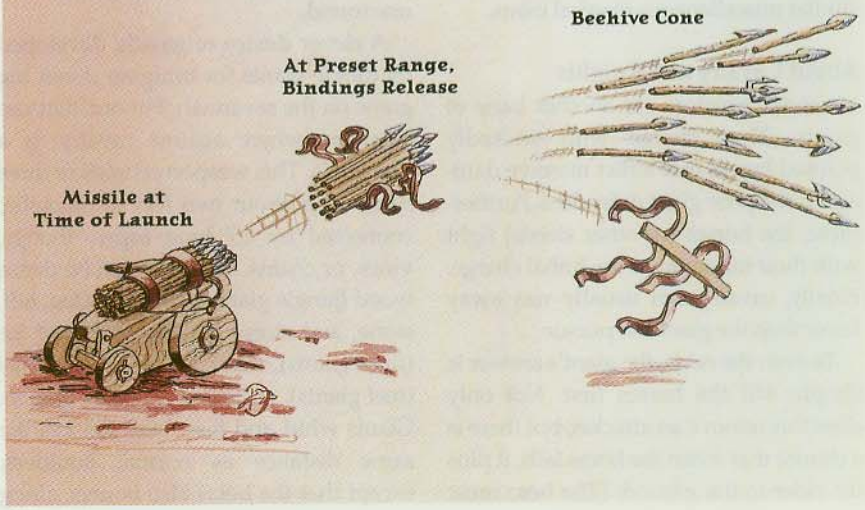


Table 3. Giant Missile Capabilities

Giant	Boulder Damage[1]	Boulder Range[2]	%Catch[3]	Other Missile Weapons
Cloud	3d10	80/160/240	55%	None
Cyclopskin	None	None	None	Hurling spear (1d6) or sling (1d6) with –2 attack penalty.
Cyclops	2d12	50/100/150	20%	None
Desert	None	None	None	Throwing spears for 2d6+7 hp damage; range 3/6/9.
Ettin	None	None	None	None
Firbolg	None	None[4]	75%	None[4]
Fire	2d12	70/140/200	50%	Ballistae, see text. 2d12+6 if heated
Fog	3d10	80/160/240	55%	None
Fomorian	None	None	None	None
Frost	2d10	70/140/200	40%	None
Hill	2d8	70/140/200	30%	None
Jungle	None	None	None	Huge longbows #AT 2; Dmg 2d6+9 each; SA poisoned arrows; range 100/200/350. Also bolas (see text).
Mountain	2d12	70/140/200	30%	None
Reef	3d10	120/240/350	30%	None
Stone	3d10	100/200/300	90%	None
Storm	None	None	65%	Composite bow; #AT 2; Dmg 3d6 each; range 100/200/300.
Verbeeg	None	None	None	Spears (see *MM*/147).
Voadkyn	None	None	None	Longbow; #AT 2; Dmg 1d8 each; range 60/120/200.

1. **Boulder Damage:** The amount of damage inflicted by a specific giant throwing a boulder or similar object (e.g., a frost giant throwing a block of ice). Note that the giant's damage bonus due to Strength is not added to its boulder damage.

2. **Boulder Range:** The information presented in *Giantcraft* stating that all giants have a maximum boulder range of 200 yards is discarded in favor of the approach taken for other thrown missile weapons. The ranges given in this table are for short, medium (–2), and long (–5) ranges, all in yards. The maximum ranges are from the MONSTROUS MANUAL tome.

3. **% Catch:** The % for a giant catching a boulder is also taken from MONSTROUS MANUAL, since that work addresses all giants and gives more accurate gaming data. Note that the chance for a giant catching a boulder is the same for the giant to swat away or catch a large missile from siege engines such as a ballista, catapult, trebuchet, etc. Giants may not catch or swat away missile weapons such as sling bullets, arrows, and javelins; the only exception to this is the firbolg.

4. **Note:** Firbolgs do not catch boulders but swat them and other missile weapons away, up to two per round. The information in the MONSTROUS MANUAL that firbolgs can toss caught boulders back is discarded since firbolgs are relatively small compared to other giants.

chance for surprise (–2 to the victims' surprise rolls), it also prevents the victim from casting spells and speaking the command words for wands, rings, and similar miscellaneous magical items.

About Cavalry and Knights

Mounted warriors are another bane of giants. They charge with wickedly pointed lances that inflict massive damage to the poor giant defenders. Furthermore, the horses (or other steeds) fight with their master after the initial charge. Finally, cavalry can usually run away faster than the giant can pursue.

To even the odds, the giant's answer is simple: kill the horses first. Not only does this remove an attacker, but there is a chance that when the horse falls, it pins the rider to the ground. (The hero must make a riding—land-based proficiency check to avoid this fate.) Riders pinned under a horse may free themselves with a successful bend bars/lift gates roll in one round.

A clever device originally developed by jungle giants for bringing down big game on the savannah, but one that can work anywhere against cavalry, is a giant bola. This weapon consists of three balls, each about two feet in diameter, connected by 15' long ropes, thongs, vines, or chains. The balls can be dense wood (jungle giants), boulders (fog, hill, stone, and storm giants), blocks of ice (frost giants), razor sharp coral chunks (reef giants), or heated iron (fire giants). Giants whirl and toss these devices the same distance as normal boulders, except that the bolas also bounce along the ground (or skip across the water) for one-quarter the same distance after they land due to the strength of the giant and the inertia of the balls.

Example: *A fire giant can toss boulders out to 200 yards. A bola tossed by a fire giant at maximum range lands at the 200-yard mark but bounces along for another 50 yards.*

Anything hit by a giant bola is wrapped up by the cords and sustains 2d4+2 hp damage from each ball. Horses hit by a giant bola have a 40% chance of breaking a leg. Releasing a victim from the tight bola cords requires three rounds of assistance (or a successful bend bars/lift gates roll).

Where cavalry is not a threat, giant bolas are useful against flying creatures, although they can be cast at only half normal range and have no "bounce."

They are also dandy weapons against wizards. A *stoneskinned* PC hit by a bola suffers three "attacks" (one per ball) but is still wrapped up. Likewise, a hero with *protection from normal missiles* cast suffers no damage but still must deal with being entangled by the bola.

Just as with dwarves, pits are good against horses. If confronted with a cavalry attack, the giants should make their pits wide enough so that the impetus of the cavalry charge fizzles. The longest lance is 14 feet long, so it follows that, if a pit is 20 feet wide, all the clever giant in the pit has to do is back away from the charging horse and watch it slam to a halt before it gets to the pit.

Avoiding Caltrops

One of the nastiest, most low-down, cowardly devices ever used by humans and demihumans are caltrops (from the *Complete Thief's Handbook*). They are hard to see and hard on the feet.

Fortunately, some fire giants came up with a simple device: iron or dragonskin boots. These gigantic boots have soles that caltrops simply cannot penetrate; instead, the giant flattens them (the boots also protect against *spike growth* spells). Clever giants cover the boots with fur or leather to conceal their true nature. (No giant wants an enemy priest casting *heat* or *chill metal* on the boots.)

It is rumored that some giants have become fighting specialists with these boots, using kicking as their main attack (2 attacks/round; damage 1d6 plus Strength bonus). These giants have wickedly pointed metal tips on their boots, and because kicks are near ground level, they suffer only a –1 penalty against dwarves. An attack roll of a natural 20 means that the giant has booted the target 1d4 × 10 yards away, and the victim suffers an additional 2d6 damage and is stunned for 1d4 rounds. Targets of size L or larger are not punted away but are stunned for one round.

Bouldering

Whether the terrain is open or constricted, crafty giants gain an extra edge by retreating to high ground and then unleashing a prepared avalanche onto their opponents. Originally called "bouldering" by the stone giants who invented the tactic, the avalanche need not consist of boulders. While mountain and stone giants use large rocks, jungle giants unleash large piles of logs, and frost giants use blocks of ice and snow. Fire giants typically use boulders or iron balls, but if the terrain is right, they can use a dammed pool of lava, breaking it so that the molten lava flows down into the attackers.

Sly giants unleash their bouldering attack when it is too late for their opponents to retreat back down the slope (i.e., when they are more than halfway up). Those caught in an avalanche must make successful Dexterity checks at a –4 penalty or suffer 3d12 hp damage and be stunned for 1d4 rounds. Mounts that survive this attack have a 50% chance of breaking a leg. Ice and lava attacks may inflict additional cold or fire damage. All bouldering attacks have wonderful effects on adventurers under the effects of a *stoneskin* spell. The DM should roll 1d12 to determine how many *stoneskin* effects are removed by the boulders.

Some giants have found this tactic so useful that they rig avalanches in conjunction with fighting pits (See **Figure 3**).

Fine Feathered Friends

The Achilles' heel of giants is the aerial attack. Elf griffon riders firing bows from

long distances, wizards casting *meteor swarms* from giant eagles, or dragons can destroy giant ranks quickly. Just as bad are winged beasts landing armed warriors or dwarves at the giants' rear. Worse yet are invisible wizards who fly to a good vantage point and blast the hapless giants with spells.

Two countermeasures must be kept in mind. The first sound tactic is to secure alliances with winged beasts friendly to the giants. If possible, alliances with dragons are best. Not only do they hold lesser flying creatures at bay, but they radiate a *fear* aura that often makes opponents flee. Better yet, they can detect invisible creatures and often deflect magical attacks with their natural resistance. Best of all, they have no attack penalties while fighting dwarves and their stout kin. The downside to making such alliances, of course, is that dragons and other winged friends of the giants want a share of any loot and generally insist on a very lopsided portion. **Table 2** lists the probable dragon allies of giants.

If no winged allies are available and the opponents have significant flying allies, the only secure countermeasure is to flee underground or to terrain where the elves' or humans' winged creatures have no advantage.

For Players Only

If you're the DM, don't read the following section. It's only fair that the players have a few tricks capable of surprising your biggest monsters. Besides, your tricks should be more than enough to even the odds.

Reconnaissance

Adventurers who war against giants absolutely must reconnoiter the area prior to conducting an attack. Those who blindly charge in without doing so are likely to wind up as the main course at the giant's feast table.

Reconnaissance reveals, among other things, where the giants have placed missile weapons, traps, and fortifications, where their main forces are located, avenues that the giants might use to maneuver against the PCs, places where the PCs might use a giant-fighting formation to greatest effect, any allies that the giants might have, and other pertinent information. With such intelligence, smart PCs can plan a battle ahead of time and pick ground of their own choosing.

Although certain divination spells like *augury, divination,* or *commune* might help, there is nothing that beats on-the-ground reconnaissance. PCs with *invisibility* can move into giant territory but must avoid contact lest the giants realize a spy is in their midst and shift their defenses accordingly.

One good option for reconnoitering underground giant lairs is to have a PC wizard cast *invisibility* upon himself, move close to the lair entrance, then cast *wizard eye* to spy out the interior. Keeping the *wizard eye* well above the ground level is a good idea, especially if hell hounds, or other *invisibility*-detecting creatures happen to be present, since they are unlikely to be looking up. Multiple *wizard eyes* can yield great results for those PCs who move with caution.

For giant positions that are outdoors, flying invisible PCs are a promising option. One rule of caution: sometimes giants are allied with dragons and other winged terrors, and invisible PCs are warned to steer clear of them because of their keen senses or their innate ability to see invisible creatures. Note, however, that a dragon's ability to detect invisible creatures is limited to 10 feet per age category; thus the most powerful dragon, the great wyrm, has a mere 120' range.

One of the best but often overlooked spies is a druid PC with shapechanging ability. Even the most suspicious giant, dragon, or hell hound is unlikely to suspect much from an eagle flying around outside. A jungle giant won't take much interest in a monkey climbing a nearby tree, nor will a reef giant take note of a sea snake swimming around. Even a stone giant might not pay considerable attention to another bat in its cave. Shapechanged druids must still take precautions, however. Not only should they assume a form native to the area but also they should be careful about attracting natural predators. Finally, they must remember to act naturally: if a predator, giant, or one of its allies gets too close, they should retreat in fear, just as the animal would.

One at a Time

An adventuring party is encouraged to focus its attacks on single targets rather than spread the attacks among numerous giant foes. Smart heroes focus their attacks on one giant until he falls. They then shift attacks to the next giant, then the next, and so on until all giants are down. PCs should be careful to specify this intention when making their melee declarations.

Get the Giants in Restricted Terrain

While giants like to fight in the open, PCs should choose ground that is restricted. If the terrain is a narrow defile or passage, it supports the principle of taking out one giant at a time (above). It also supports a good giant-fighting formation. The narrower the passage, the better. The best situation is one in which only one giant at a time can fight.

Forests and jungles are especially favorable for giant-fighting parties. Imagine a giant trying to maneuver or wield his sword or spear in a dense forest where tree branches are thick. A DM could rule that a giant has a –2 penalty to his attack rolls, as well as a movement penalty in such terrain. In the meantime, PCs could conduct a fighting retreat through the woods, all the while peppering the giants with missile weapons and spells. Giants attacking through dense foliage have additional headaches when an adventuring party includes a druid who casts some well-placed *entangle* spells on the trees. The worst headache a giant can imagine is fighting in a forest and running into a treant allied with the PCs! (Treants, being native to the forests, have no attack penalties in such terrain).

If trees are sparse, spells such as magical *walls* (*force, stone, ice, fire*) can help restrict the giants' advance, as can caltrops (see the *Complete Thief's Handbook*). Natural terrain, such as a steep cliff or an unfordable river, can be the outmatched adventurer's saving grace. Of course, one must keep in mind that a 10' deep river, while unfordable to most adventuring PCs, is easily crossed by an 18' tall giant, although it might slow him down (DM's discretion, but generally anywhere from a one-third to one-half movement rate reduction might apply depending on the depth of the river and the strength of its flow).

The Anti-Giant Fighting Formation

When fighting giants in restricted terrain, heroes are also restricted in how many can fight in the front-line against the giants.

The first rank should include dwarves or other short warrior-classed PCs with good armor and high Dexterity. Not only do the giants suffer penalties when attacking these PCs, but also they have the added disadvantage of fighting PCs with good armor, high hit points, and deadly weapons. A taller PC might take the place of a shorter PC in the front rank, especially if he carries a *sword of giant slaying* or similar device, but short PCs are best.

In the second rank should be another warrior-classed PC who is proficient with a spear, pike, or other long polearm. Typically this is a PC taller than his comrades in the front rank and who can strike up at the giant without getting in the way of his companions. The second rank could also include a priest PC who casts curative magic on front-line PCs. A polearm-wielding paladin is a good choice for the second rank, as his *protection from evil* aura helps those in the first rank.

The third rank includes archers or crossbowmen who are far enough back to shoot above the heads of the first two ranks and into the upper body of the giant.

The last rank(s) includes any wizards, who, given their low hit points and generally poor AC, really want no part of melee with a giant but are within range to use their high-powered spells. The last rank might include rogue PCs who use slings or other missile weapons to shoot above the heads of the first three ranks and who provide a small measure of security against any giants that might maneuver against the spellcasters.

Being caught in a two-front attack by giants is not fun, but if it occurs, the formation must shift to meet the threat and save the wizard or priest. While the rogues protect the wizards initially, any available warriors in the second or third rank should shift immediately to the rear and provide protection. At this point the wizard should concentrate all his spell attacks on this nearest threat.

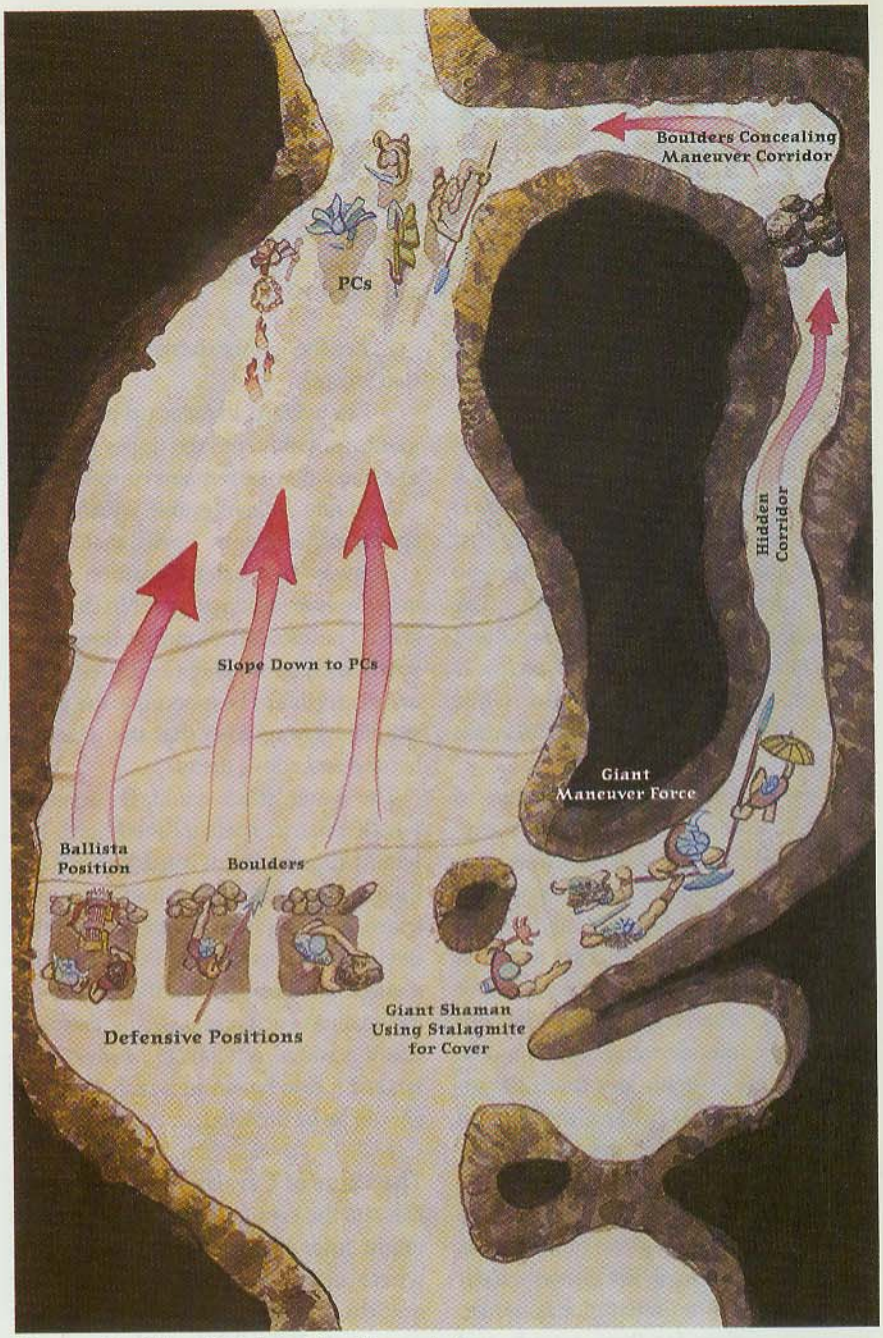


Figure 3: Giant Defensive Template

Secure the Air

The greatest threat to the giant-fighting formation is an attack from above. Often giants ally themselves with dragons, rocs, or other huge winged beasts. If this occurs, one well-placed blast of dragon breath can wipe out the entire formation. Thus, the priority target is the aerial threat as soon as it appears.

Not only should wizards and priests focus their attacks on flying creatures, but whenever possible PCs should have flying allies of their own or flying capabilities. Not only can this help gain aerial superiority, but surprise may be gained by inflicting serious casualties on the giants from above. Griffons are generally good allies, as are good-aligned dragons, but the downside is that griffons or other winged creatures generally require the allocation of two nonweapon proficiency slots for the airborne riding proficiency (specific creature).

If the PCs attain aerial supremacy, two aerial weapons for bombardment deserve mention. The first is a Greek fire cluster, which consists of a sack containing 20 Greek fire vials. The sack has a quick release cord that the rider pulls to dash the contents onto oncoming giants.

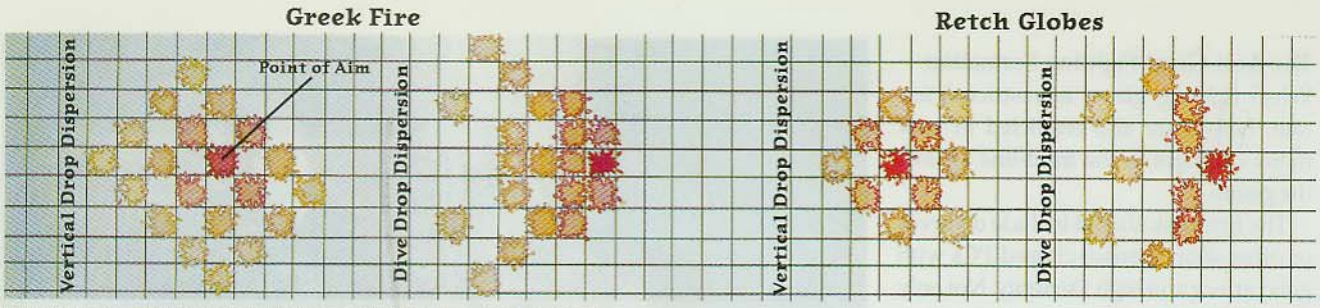


Figure 4: Dispersal Patterns (Scale: 1 Sq = 10')

Figure 4 depicts the dispersal patterns of the vials if dropped vertically or from a diving attack. In game terms, the rider must make a riding—airborne proficiency check before making the attack and an attack roll vs. AC 10. If either is unsuccessful, then the center of the dispersion pattern is relocated according to the scatter diagram in the *DMG*. The only difference is that diving attacks and vertical attacks from 100 feet or lower are considered medium range, while vertical attacks higher than 100 feet are long range.

There are some obvious downsides to this missile. First, no PC wants to be anywhere near a sack full of Greek fire should it prematurely ignite—say, from an evil wizard's *fireball* or a red dragon's breath weapon. Smart PCs try to find a sack fashioned from red dragon hide or some other fire-resistant material, but buying or commissioning one should be difficult and cost no less than 200 gp (excluding the cost of the Greek fire, of course). Finally, the Greek fire cluster would have no effect against fire giants.

A good alternative, if one can find the munitions, is a retch globe bundle. This works just as a Greek fire cluster except that it contains ten retch globes, which nauseate victims for three rounds and halve their Strength for an hour. Furthermore, each globe has a 5' diameter area of effect plus a 25% chance of splashing targets 5–9 feet away. Like the Greek fire cluster, it is wise not to allow the globes to sunder prematurely, and they are also dreadfully expensive. If the PCs are in an area where retch plants are native, a bundle costs 500 gp. If the globes must be imported, they cost 5,000 gp.

PCs without flying capabilities or mounts should seek alternatives to achieving surprise from the air. One good routine is as follows:

1. Hide a wizard well (invisibly if possible);
2. Let the giants charge past the hidden wizard;
3. The wizard *levitates* up behind the giants (possibly into the upper branches of a tree where he remains concealed);
4. While *levitating*, the wizard casts spells at the giants. Spells that would give away the caster's location (like a *magic missile* striking a giant in the back) should be avoided. Nondirect area-effect spells such as *stinking cloud, wall of fire*, and so forth are best because the giants should have no idea that the wizard is behind and above them.

The same effect could be achieved with a *rope trick* spell, if timed right. This would require the wizard to hide and then emerge from the extradimensional space, hanging from a rope seat or other device to cast spells. Any PC who makes a successful rope use proficiency check can fashion such a seat. Using this spell has the added advantage of giving the wizard a safe haven in which to retreat should he be detected.

The Value of Cavalry

Despite the best-laid plans, adventurers might find themselves in open terrain where giants are likely to maneuver quickly against dismounted, slower opponents. If the PCs have the resources, they should consider a mounted cavalry reserve armed with lances. The reserve should be concealed and on orders to fall on the giants' flank or rear. Charging warriors armed with lances inflict terrible damage, although only two or three can attack a single giant while mounted.

Cavalry has another distinct advantage: if the going gets too rough, cavalry can pick up dismounted comrades and whisk them to safety. Picking up a dismounted person requires a riding—land-based proficiency check. If the dismounted person is less than five feet tall, there is a –1 penalty for every foot less than five feet.

Example: *Horsa, a dwarven fighter, has taken massive damage and needs to be taken off the battlefield before the giants beat him into the ground. Horsa is 4'3" tall. Sir Thornwood, a paladin, rides up and attempts to lean out of the saddle, grab the dwarf, and swing him behind his saddle. He must make a riding proficiency check at –1 (due to Horsa's height). If Horsa had a magical item such as* boots of striding and springing, *the DM could rule that there is no such penalty.*

Cavalry provides another great tactic against giant opponents: the delaying action. This is where adventuring parties trade space for time against attacking giants. **Figure 5** depicts this maneuver. At each designated position, PCs dismount, fire missiles, or cast spells at extreme range to inflict damage on the giants, and then ride away before the giants can close. This is repeated again and again until the giants are so weakened that the PCs can charge in or finish off the giants with a final destructive spell or wave of attacks. Centaur mounts, if available, are especially useful as centaur archers add their missiles to the PCs' barrage.

Maximize Your Magic

The most powerful trump card in the PCs' anti-giant arsenal is the repertoire of magical spells, items, and artifacts in their possession. Giants are generally quite good at melee combat and are no slouches when it comes to missile fire, but generally they are very restricted in magic. Thus, PCs should use magic to its maximum advantage.

Generally speaking, PCs should first use delaying spells to wear the giants down and keep them under missile fire longer (such as *entangle, trip, transmute rock to mud, summon swarm*, and *monster summoning* spells) before melee occurs. Spells like *prayer, bless, aid, stoneskin, strength, haste, protection from normal missiles*, and others should be cast to protect

and assist those who face the giants in melee. Wizards should not be so quick to use their major destructive spells (*cloudkill, ice storm, delayed blast fireball*) until they are sure that they have a ripe target, preferably a giant shaman or witch doctor, a fearsome aerial opponent, or a force threatening the PCs' flank or rear. There is nothing worse than blowing a *lightning bolt* into a pack of frost giants, only to find out that they were nothing but illusions created by some evil wizard (or dragon) in league with the giants, or that the two giants you fried were only the first two in a band of twelve.

In addition to the mass destruction spells and the others mentioned earlier, the following spells and spell effects are among the best when taking on giants.

◆ ***Polymorph self* combined with *tongues:*** This is probably the best disguise available for penetrating a giant stronghold to determine its strengths and weaknesses. Not only does it allow the PC to speak Giantish but it transforms him into a giant with all the Strength bonuses. The best candidate for this mission is a multi-class wizard/thief or cleric/thief, since *tongues* must be cast on oneself. So also must *polymorph self,* but any PC can use a *potion of polymorph self.* Note that the *polymorph self* effect can be replicated to some degree by casting *enlarge* in conjunction with the *alter self* spell, but this does not give the caster any special giant abilities (or language), and it has a much shorter duration. *Enlarge* also does not add much to the Strength or damage inflicted by the recipient (see spell description).

◆ ***Grease:*** As this spell affects only a 10' × 10' area, it is best used in terrain where giants are channeled or where it might cause a giant to stumble off a cliff or some similarly precarious footing. If the giant just falls on the ground, apply falling damage according to the giant's height. Specifically, if he is less than 10 feet tall, he suffers 1d3 hp damage. For every 10 feet thereafter, he suffers 1d6 damage. A better variant of this, if available, is the sleet version of *ice storm,* which has a much bigger area (80' diameter) and provides a far better chance (50%) of giants slipping and falling each round, as well as being blinded.

◆ ***Fumble:*** Since giants move fairly quickly, it is best to target one giant with this spell rather than casting it into an area. Each round, the giant has to make a saving throw. Failure means that he drops his big weapon or falls. Even if the giant succeeds with his saving throw, he is affected as per the *slow* spell (+4 AC penalty, attack penalty of –4, movement rate cut in half, and saving throw penalty of –4).

◆ ***Evard's Black Tentacles:*** Even if the giants in the area of effect make their saving throws or rip free of the tentacles (not much problem, considering the giants' Strength scores), they suffer damage. A real nasty use of this spell is to cast it when giants are crossing a river, stream or other obstacle. Tentacles grabbing them from underwater is no more fun for giants than it is for heroes, and there is always the chance that a giant might not free himself and drown.

◆ ***Tree:*** This is a good spell for a priest PC to trick a giant into passing him in pursuit of his companions, letting the priest attack from the rear. Even better is the *massmorph* spell, which allows an entire fighting force to pose as trees, let the giants go by, then fall on them from the rear with surprise.

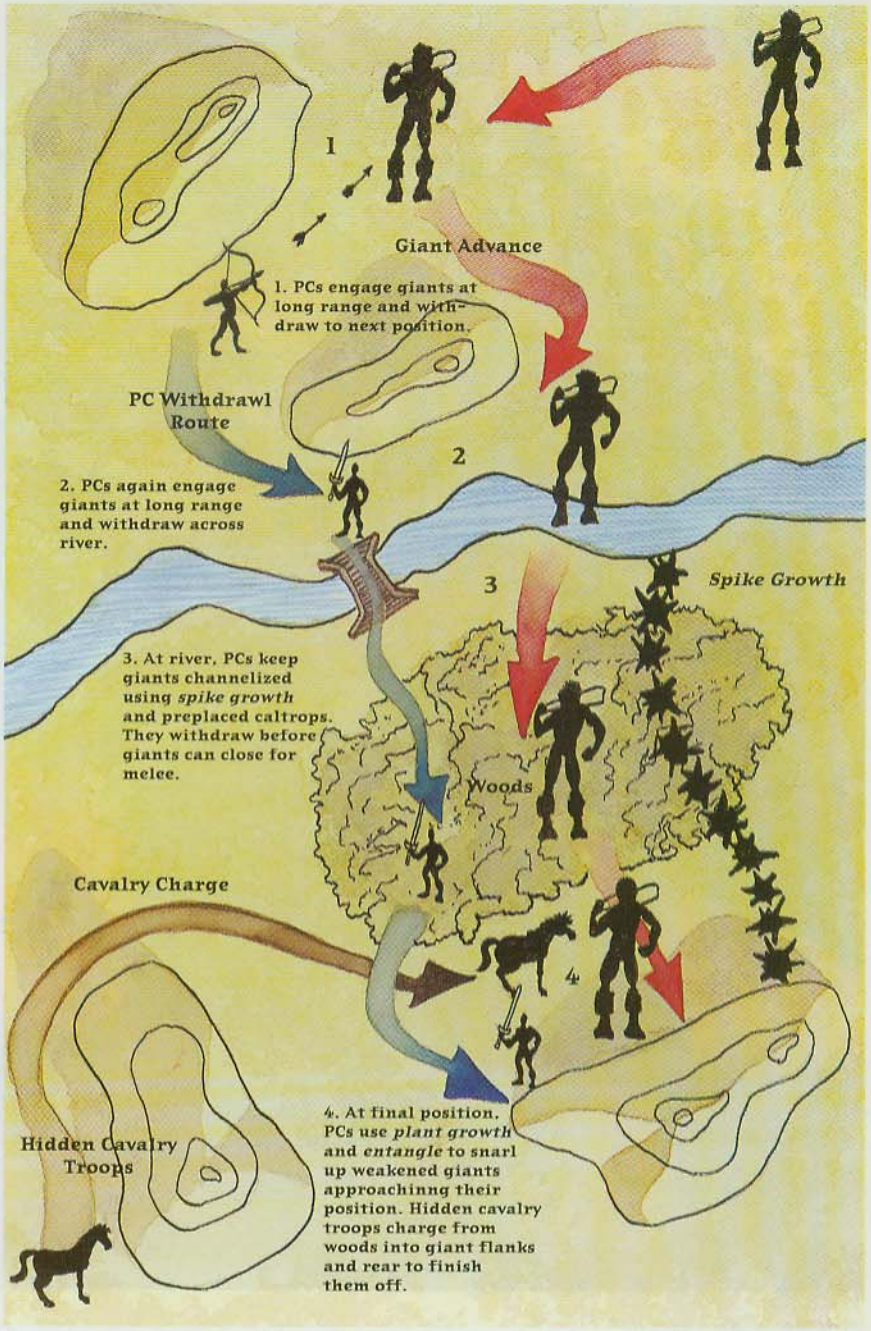

1
Giant Advance
1. PCs engage giants at long range and withdraw to next position.
PC Withdrawl Route
2
2. PCs again engage giants at long range and withdraw across river.
3
Spike Growth
3. At river, PCs keep giants channelized using *spike growth* and preplaced caltrops. They withdraw before giants can close for melee.
Woods
Cavalry Charge
4
4. At final position, PCs use *plant growth* and *entangle* to snarl up weakened giants approachinng their position. Hidden cavalry troops charge from woods into giant flanks and rear to finish them off.
Hidden Cavalry Troops

Figure 5: The Delaying Action

◆ ***Plant Growth:*** Where there is vegetation, this can be one of the most effective spells in the spellcaster's repertoire. The area of effect is enormous as a large, thick plant barrier is formed, reducing movement to 20 feet per round. This spell, combined with *entangle*, can bring a group of giants to a halt. Once the giants are stopped, heroes can use all the other destructive spells (or other means) at their disposal to deal with them.

◆ ***Spike Growth:*** Without magical assistance, this excellent spell is virtually undetectable and inflicts 2d4 hp damage every 10 feet traveled. There is also a fair chance that victims suffer a movement rate reduction. Just as the giants enter the area affected by the *spike growth* spell, have your friendly priest cast *plant growth* in it so that their movement is further impaired and they suffer double damage from the spikes.

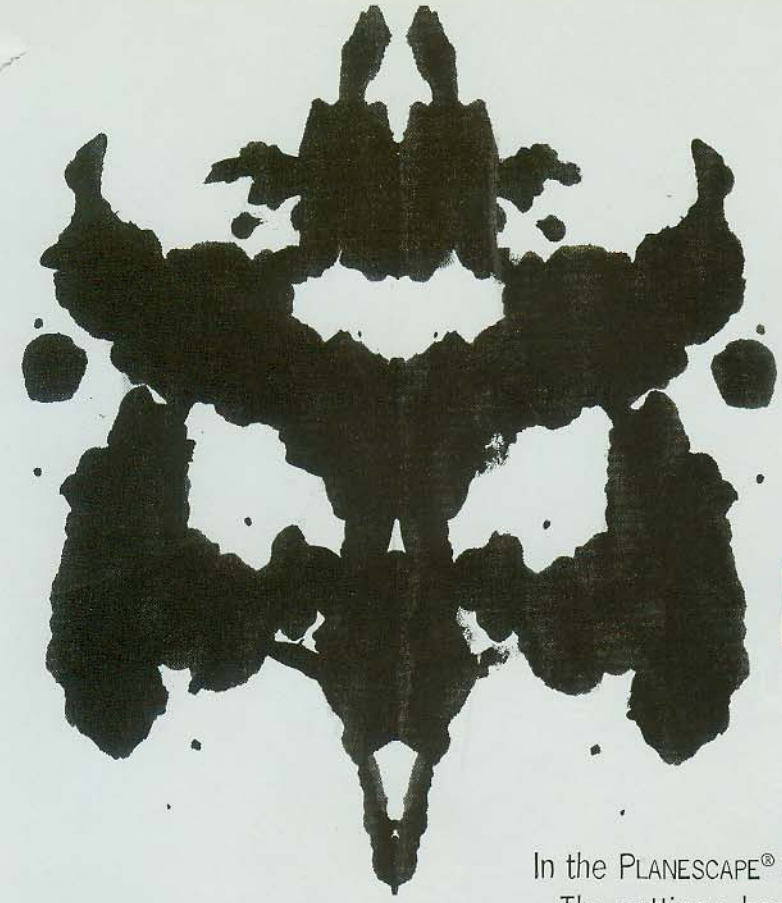
◆ ***Rainbow (bridge):*** Known among giant-hunters as the "bait and fall," this trap simply consists of heroes fleeing over a previously cast *rainbow bridge* that spans a terrible fall. Once the heroes are safely on the other side, the wizard waits until giants set foot on the bridge. He cancels the spell, and the giants fall to their deaths. A variation of this trap has the *rainbow bridge* cast over a vast expanse of muddy ground or quicksand. When the bridge is dispelled and the giants fall in, a priest casts *transmute mud to rock*, rendering the giants stationary targets for missile fire, destructive spells, and the like. Sadistic PCs might even dispel the bridge just over some innocent looking vegetation ... which has received *spike growth* and *plant growth* spells. Giants who are suspicious about crossing the bridge might be *taunted*, although the wizard doing so should be fleet of foot.

◆ ***Glyph of Warding:*** These are the equivalent of fantasy mines and are best used in constricted terrain. Although they generally don't kill a giant outright, they can cause significant damage or inflict blindness or paralysis.

◆ ***Explosive Runes:*** Ordinarily used to guard a wizard's spell book, these can be used in a different way with giants who normally could care less about a spellbook. All that is needed is someone who can write in the language of their giant adversaries. The *runes* are cast onto a large piece of parchment, which is folded over and left in a spot where the giants can find it. The outside is labeled in the giants' native tongue to entice one to read the inside ("Secret way to King Buldgrug's Treasure," for instance). Curious giants might (30% chance) open the parchment and suffer the effects, but since giants ordinarily do not have high Intelligence, it is more likely they might turn it over to their leaders, shamans, or witch doctors.

A final principle for the PC wizard or priest is to hold nothing back if personally threatened. If a magic-wielding PC dies or falls unconscious, the other adventurers' capabilities have suddenly diminished, and they could quickly fall under the knobby clubs of the giants. Thus a simple rule: if the wizard or priest cannot get away, blast any oncoming giants with the fastest, deadliest spell or item available. Hold nothing back, because the giants most assuredly won't.

Paul encourages players and DMs alike to try out any of the ideas in this article in "Preemptive Strike," his giant adventure that will appear in DUNGEON® Adventures *#74. And he hotly denies that he is part fire giant. Sicilian, yes, fire giant no.*



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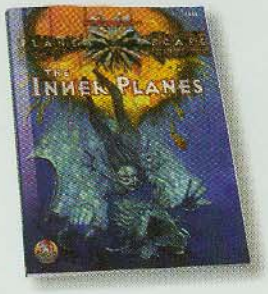

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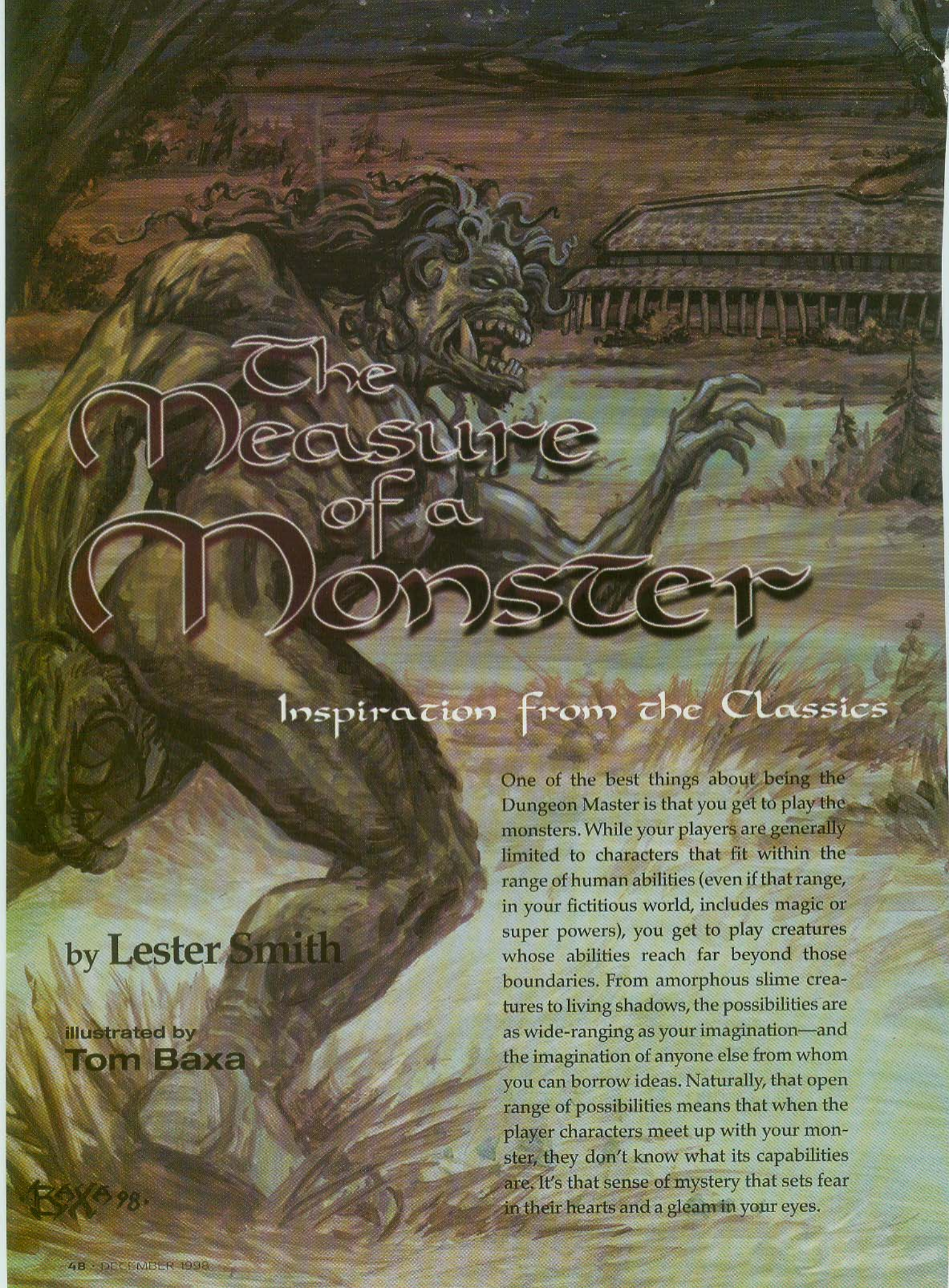

The Measure of a Monster

Inspiration from the Classics

by **Lester Smith**

illustrated by
Tom Baxa

One of the best things about being the Dungeon Master is that you get to play the monsters. While your players are generally limited to characters that fit within the range of human abilities (even if that range, in your fictitious world, includes magic or super powers), you get to play creatures whose abilities reach far beyond those boundaries. From amorphous slime creatures to living shadows, the possibilities are as wide-ranging as your imagination—and the imagination of anyone else from whom you can borrow ideas. Naturally, that open range of possibilities means that when the player characters meet up with your monster, they don't know what its capabilities are. It's that sense of mystery that sets fear in their hearts and a gleam in your eyes.

Of course, to maintain that sense of mystery, you have to keep the players guessing. After a while, they know all the capabilities of orcs, how many points of damage a vampire can sustain, and even what the various colors of dragons mean in terms of attitude and breath. (It's a sad day when dragons and unicorns become just another set of statistics.) New monsters are published frequently, and you can't guarantee that the players won't read the new MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® book—or "Dragon's Bestiary" article, for that matter—so how are you to maintain the sense of mystery you desire? The best answer might be to start designing your own monsters. How better to go about learning to do so than to consider some of the best examples from myth and fiction?

Cyclopes

Most of us have heard of the Cyclopes, but I suspect that few of us have actually read the tales surrounding them. In fact, many readers might be surprised to learn that the term refers to not one but many creatures. The original Cyclopes were three gigantic brothers, sons of Poseidon, who aided Zeus and the other new gods in their battle against the Titans. From these three sprang a race of one-eyed giants who lived as shepherds.

Perhaps the most commonly known story involving a Cyclops is that of Odysseus's encounter with one named Polyphemos. Related within the *Odyssey*, this tale finds Odysseus and his men discovering a cavern near a shore, with sheep penned near its mouth. Investigating, they find that the cavern contains rough furnishings for a creature of enormous size, and it is provisioned with bread, cheese, and milk. Largely out of curiosity, Odysseus decides that he and his dozen warriors will wait for the Cyclops to return. In the meantime, they help themselves to some of his food, having brought gifts of their own—a wineskin full of fiery brandy, and "some victuals in a bag"—for their host, whom Odysseus admittedly suspects will be an uncivilized brute.

When the giant does return, the men are astonished by his size, and they instinctively hide along the walls of the cavern. The Cyclops enters and pulls an enormous stone across the cavern entry, then sets about milking his sheep and preparing the whey for his supper. Although he does not yet know that he has visitors, the men are effectively trapped inside the cave with him, because the stone door is far too heavy for them to hope of moving.

Odysseus and his men are revealed when the Cyclops starts a fire. He asks

The Monster: A Dictionary Definition

In preparing to design a monster, it might help to consider what makes things monstrous and what doesn't. For example, a tiger might strike fear into us, but it probably isn't monstrous. On the other hand, a reanimated kitten might just suit the bill.

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, a monster is something or someone "abnormally developed ... of strange or terrifying shape ... unusually large for its kind ..." and/or "extremely ugly, wicked, or cruel." Any one of those descriptions is a reasonable place to start designing a monster of your own.

"Abnormally Developed"

Within the topic of horror, "abnormally developed" generally means some type of mutation. A monster of this sort still bears some resemblance to the species from which it sprang but has been hideously deformed in some way. The fact that we can tell what the thing once was just underlines how unnatural it is now. Most likely, we assume that it is tormented with pain and self-loathing as a result of its mutation, and that it has been maddened by that torment. No one expects to reason with a mutated monster. Instead we just assume that it is intent upon killing anything that comes within its reach. Consequently, we both loathe and fear it. We loathe it because it is ugly, because it is Nature gone wrong, and maybe its existence suggests that what Nature has done to this creature it can do to us. We fear it because it is cut off from the rest of creation, because we expect it to lash back, and because it is something of a mystery. We cannot be certain of what its abilities have become.

"Unusually Large for Its Kind"

"Unusually large" covers the category of simpler monsters such as giants. The legendary roc fits under this heading as well, being a hunting bird so large it could carry off elephants, or even sailing ships. While not disgusting like mutated creatures, gigantic beasts can be every bit as awesome, making normal humans seem as helpless as the ants below their own feet. Game masters shouldn't feel ashamed to use giants fairly frequently in their adventures. The sight of a stag beetle big as a bull ought to give any player character pause. A giant whose ankles are shoulder height to a normal man ought to frighten them as well.

"Of Strange or Terrifying Shape"

Although mutations can fit within this category, the heading better serves creatures such as fantasy demons and fiends. Such beings are frequently depicted as mismatched conglomerations of body parts that ought to belong to other, normal creatures. Ghosts and undead monsters belong to this category as well, their forms being terrifying in that ghosts break the unspoken rule that spirits ought not to be visible, while undead violate the known fact that corpses shouldn't be walking around.

"Extremely Ugly, Wicked, or Cruel"

Sadly, being extremely ugly is enough to qualify a creature for monsterhood. This may be most applicable in fantasy games, which, like fairy tales, often involve a certain simplification of good and evil. Good creatures are beautiful, and evil creatures are ugly; hence Tolkein's lovely elves and hideous orcs. Lest we be too quick to criticize that simplification, let's consider that, on occasion, we may need to "vacation" in that simple a world view; hence, the popularity of *Star Wars* on the one hand and mainstream comic books on the other.

"Ugly" aside, that leaves us with "wicked or cruel." Under this heading fall those creatures that we would expect to act civilized, but who betray us. This is a very rich vein of monstrousness to tap in game-mastering a role-playing game. See the discussions of the Cyclops, Dracula, and Frankenstein, for more about this idea.

Some Basic Mechanics of Monster Design

There are a few simple tricks to keep in mind when preparing a monster for play, especially when determining its game statistics. While the creature's behavior and your description set the stage for your players' reactions to the monster, once their characters engage it in combat, those game mechanics need to bear out the expectations you have built. Most of these tricks are pretty obvious, once they have been pointed out. But like many simple concepts, they are frequently overlooked.

Attack Abilities

First, consider how fast and accurate the creature is in combat, compared to how much damage it does when it connects. A slow creature that doesn't swing very often, or doesn't connect much of the time, can still be dreadfully frightening if it does incredible damage when it does connect. A giant fits into this category, for instance, as does an acidic slime. On the other hand, a fast but weak creature can be equally frightening, lashing multiple times before the player characters have a chance to strike, even if it bleeds them only a bit each time. Of course, this also means that slow, weak creatures are nearly worthless unless they attack en masse, while fast creatures that do deadly damage with each strike might destroy your whole party of PCs before *any* have a chance to react.

Defense Abilities

Second, decide how easily your creature evades attacks compared to how tough it is when hit. A lightning-fast snake-man might avoid a dozen blows, for instance, but perish with a single hit, while a lumbering giant might never avoid a blow, but resist the damage of each one, or be able to sustain high levels of damage before being in any danger. Again, a slow and weak creature is pretty pathetic, offering little threat to your PCs. But be careful with fast and tough creatures; they can be nearly impossible to kill.

Special Characteristics

Finally, when it comes to game mechanics, what makes one creature distinctly different from all others is what special abilities and disabilities it possesses. Does it use magic or psionics? Both would lead a player character to presume that it is highly intelligent, though as a change of pace you might try designing an unintelligent beast that uses magic instinctively. Perhaps it inflicts incredible pain at its touch, crippling its victim for a turn or two. That can be a frightening concept for a player, as can a character's temporary blindness, and both are much more evocative than the more traditional paralyzing strike. It's much more dramatic to be helpless in agony than to be numb.

On the other hand, you can temper the impact of these special abilities by giving the creature an "Achilles' heel" of some sort. Whether that merely cuts it down to size for the duration of one battle—"We know the beast hates the cold, so we'll lure it into the mountains"—or defeats it utterly, serving as an escape clause, as in the case of Smaug's final defeat in *The Hobbit*, a special weakness can help balance the tally against a set of otherwise overwhelming abilities.

them who they are, and Odysseus answers that they are warriors returning home from the battle for Troy, but whose ships have been blown off course. He asks that the Cyclops help them on their way, as is only right, and adds the warning that, "Zeus will avenge the unoffending guest." In response, the Cyclops calls Odysseus a "ninny," replying that he doesn't fear Zeus in the least, and that he has no intention of releasing any of them. Then he seizes two of the warriors, dashes out their brains, and proceeds to feast upon their bodies. While the Cyclops sleeps after supper, Odysseus nearly decides to kill the monster by plunging a sword into his liver. But this would leave the warrior band trapped within the cave to starve.

The next morning, when the Cyclops leaves to graze his flocks (after feasting on another pair of warriors), he seals the cavern doorway again, to keep his captives from escaping. Odysseus and his men spend the day sharpening a huge pole they find within the cavern, and harden its tip in the fire, planning to blind the monster when he sleeps.

That evening, after the Cyclops has eaten a fifth and sixth warrior, Odysseus gives him the wine; in exchange, the monster promises to eat Odysseus last. But Odysseus doesn't intend to wait around. Once the Cyclops falls into a drunken sleep, the hero and his men seize up the stake, heat its point again in the fire, and plunge it, sizzling, into the monster's eye. (There follows a bit of grim comedy as Cyclopean neighbors of the blinded Polyphemos come in response to his cries, asking who has caused him to howl so. Polyphemos answers with the name that Odysseus told him earlier, "Nobody." Thinking that he is saying that nobody has hurt him, they leave.)

Blind, the Cyclops is unable to catch and kill Odysseus and his men, but still he refuses to let them escape. When his sheep bleat to be let out in the morning, he unseals the door but sits in the entryway, feeling each sheep as it leaves, to make certain that it is not a man escaping. But Odysseus has planned ahead, and has lashed the rams of the flock together in trios, with a warrior hanging beneath each middle one. In this way, Odysseus and his men escape.

The uninitiated might expect Homer's *Odyssey* to be another dry, dusty book assigned as reading by teachers who see education and entertainment as mutually exclusive ideas. In truth, however, this epic poem is a rollicking good read, packed full of adventure. What's more, it makes an excellent source of ideas for any AD&D® campaign. Readers unfamiliar with the Greek pantheon might wish to have an encyclopedia of mythology at hand for reference, especially through the first "book" of the poem, which reveals some politics among the gods, concerning Odysseus and his family.

The Monstrousness of the Cyclops

The Cyclops in this tale meets several of our criteria for monstrousness. For one thing, like others of his kind, he is effectively a giant human, therefore a monster in size. It is this size that makes him so dangerous a foe, both in his ability to seize a man in one hand and kill him, and in the fact that he can seal his victims into the cave by setting across the door a stone too large for them to move. For another, the fact that he has only one eye

sets him further apart from humanity, making him of "strange or terrifying shape."

But what most makes this Cyclops a monster is not how he looks or how powerful he is. Rather, it is the wickedness and cruelty in his heart. He takes advantage of a band of storm-tossed men, preying upon their helplessness and weakness, and making them his meat. In an age in which travel was always perilous, travelers relied upon the hospitality of those people they encountered. For a host (or a guest, for that matter) to abuse this responsibility was an affront to both men and gods. It would be bad enough to deny a traveler aid, but to turn the host responsibility on its head by actually eating one's guests was monstrous in the extreme.

Using a "Cyclops" in Your Game

Considering this background, it isn't enough, then, in a roleplaying campaign, to treat a Cyclops as simply an unusual, one-eyed, man-eating giant. To best suit the legend, there must be some treachery involved. Of course, any player familiar with Odysseus' story is likely to be suspicious, or downright hostile, when a one-eyed giant is encountered.

It might be better, then, to invent a new monster as powerful as the Cyclops, and as seemingly harmless at first. (Remember, the Cyclopes live as shepherds, an apparently placid occupation.) If the creature seems at first a bit imposing or even frightening, but lures its victims in with words of kindness, only to turn upon them unexpectedly, that well suits the treacherous nature of this Cyclops legend. Just as your players begin to think that they were wrong to judge the creature so harshly from first appearances—and are perhaps even feeling a little guilty about it—just as they drop their guard, the monster strikes, taking advantage of their trust. To betray such innocence is truly evil. It is the sort of thing that turns good, trusting people into bitter cynics and makes this world a little closer to hell.

Dracula

Again, pretty much everyone is familiar with the figure of Dracula. Created by writer Abraham (Bram) Stoker just before the turn of the past century, the story of Dracula has done more than any other work to determine what we expect of vampires, their powers, and their behavior. Even a cursory study of vampire tales and myths before Stoker's *Dracula* reveals a wide range of backgrounds and abilities for the creatures. In some stories, they are disembodied spirits that feed upon blood; in others, they are corpses risen from the grave, little more than blood-drinking zombies; still other tales blur any distinction between vampires and werewolves; and some Asian legends speak of vampiric creatures that are nothing more than a flying head and dangling entrails. Since the publication of *Dracula* in 1897, however, vampires have settled down (at least in the Western hemisphere) to being people who physically return from the dead, bite necks to drink blood, can transform into mist, bat, or wolf, have mesmerizing mental powers over their victims, are burned to ash by sunlight, and can be destroyed by a stake through the heart. (Of course, in the novel, it was drive a stake through the heart, stuff the mouth with garlic, and cut off the head.)

There is a strong reason for the proliferation of this Dracula template: The novel is simply a very good read. The British Stoker uses a surprising range of characters—including a Texan, in London!—and makes us perceive even Count Dracula as an individual, a being with problems to solve, problems to which we can relate. Of course, it doesn't hurt that the story is underpinned with a strong current of sexual tension, with Dracula preferring to prey upon young ladies—and in this case ones who are either newly wed (Mina Harker) or affianced (Lucy Westenra)—while threatening to merely kill the men should they stand in his way. Early on, there is also a

scene in which Jonathan Harker is seduced and nearly destroyed by the bestial brides of Dracula, before being rescued by the Count, who still needs Jonathan to arrange some business affairs in London. Finally, the danger presented in the novel goes beyond even life-and-death peril. Dracula makes damnation itself a temptation to his victims. He offers eternal life, the power to seduce and command, and the sensual pleasure of preying upon others; all that is required in exchange is the sacrifice of your soul, whether that be read as being cut off from God or as abandoning your humanity.

The Monstrousness of Dracula

In some ways, Dracula is less obviously monstrous than other creatures in this list. To all appearances, he seems quite human. It is only when he changes to mist or bat or wolf that he fits the category of "strange or terrifying shape." Even then, it isn't so much the shape that is monstrous as it is the observation of him changing form.

In terms of personality, though, Dracula is wicked, cruel, and even ugly. He represents the repulsiveness of death and decay, and their endeavor to drag the living down to despair. He isn't above cruelly playing with a victim the way a cat might toy with a mouse, and he wickedly sets aside his own humanity, then destroys whomever else he wishes, putting his own selfish desires far above those of other people. Morally, then, Dracula is as monstrous as they come.

Using a "Dracula" in Your Game

Unfortunately, in roleplaying games the vampire has been done to death (pun intended). Fantasy games in particular have bled the horror right out of this monster, reducing it to little more than a set of stats and a special effect or two. Making the vampire chilling again in this setting can be a daunting task.

Still, that doesn't mean that game masters can't get at least a little mileage out of the Dracula theme. Consider, for instance, having the player characters encounter a person who is beautiful on the outside, with a charismatic appeal, who then ends up sacrificing or enslaving them, perhaps specifically to gain immortality at their expense. Or have death take on flesh, perhaps in the shape of a lovely member of the opposite sex, in an attempt to lure the PCs to their doom. This might work best if that lovely member invited death's possession for some completely selfish motive—perhaps vengeance. Or simply work with the mystery of a corpse or corpses returned to life, as part of a death god's attempt to destroy the world.

If nothing else, take a look at some vampire tales other than *Dracula*, and use vampires based upon these variant themes. The fact that the player characters won't know exactly what to expect from these life-stealing undead creatures can add some excitement and mystery back into a tired legend.

Frankenstein's Monster

Near the beginning of the nineteenth century, Mary Shelley, a young girl who happened to be married to one of the preeminent poets of the time, found herself in a weekend "ghost story" competition among her husband and some other preeminent poets. That night, inspired by the tales and discussion of the group, she dreamed of a man who had been assembled of parts of corpses, and with the help of her husband, prepared the story for presentation the next evening. Eventually, she was to write the tale as the book *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818).

As the novel's subtitle suggests, the story is more than just a tale of horror; it also aspires from the outset to be a philosophical statement. Some critics have disparaged the book as a result, saying

that it is little more than the pretentious juvenilia of a second-rate writer. In truth, the author could perhaps have been subtler with the title, and some might view the writing as a bit self-indulgent or heavy-handed. Whatever its supposed faults, however, this story has had nearly as much influence within the horror genre as the less maligned Dracula, and eighty years more longevity. Critics may complain, but as always, it is hard to argue with success.

In the tale, a Swiss medical student named Frankenstein becomes obsessed with the idea of creating life. Nowadays, a fictional scientist would likely start from scratch with organic chemicals of some kind and bombard them with a mysterious form of radiation, then watch his creation evolve from individual cells into something more complex. But Shelley was writing decades before Darwin's publication of the theory of evolution, in *Origin of Species* (1859), with nowhere near our current knowledge and theory of life processes. Consequently, young Victor Frankenstein does the best he can, assembling parts of corpses to build a man, then jump-starting it with electricity.

Unfortunately, with the creature's first twitch, Frankenstein freaks. The audacity of what he has done now rushes in upon him, horrifying him, and he determines to destroy his own creation. The trouble is, the monster is a person in his own right, effectively an innocent baby newly born into the world, then abandoned and—what's worse—condemned by its own father. Shelley writes the majority of the tale in the monster's own words, and we can hardly help but sympathize with this being as he struggles to survive and learn in a frightening world which everywhere rejects him at first sight. It would seem that Shelley suggests this as a metaphor of the human race created and then abandoned by its God, condemned to make its way in a hostile world of tooth and claw, pain and disease.

And so, Frankenstein and his monster pursue each other across the world, leaving ruin in their wake. Intellectually, Frankenstein recognizes his responsibility for the creature, and even understands the thing's torment. But emotionally, he cannot accept it as his "child." Similarly, the monster recognizes his own appalling ugliness and understands the circumstances that damn him to always be an outcast, but he cannot really come to terms with that damnation, so he fixes himself upon vengeance. Nowadays, the monster might find catharsis by joining Trent Reznor in a band. But in the early 1800s ...? I'll leave you to read the book to learn how things turn out in the end.

AD&D Game Stats

Let's translate this advice into AD&D game terms, by considering some of the headings for monster listings in the game.

No. Appearing: A big, tough brute should be solitary. Having your PCs face a whole clan of such things is not only cruel, but it also diminishes the drama of the "slow, but tough" description. Conversely, tiny but fast creatures normally work best in large groups. Singly, they are usually little more than a nuisance. In a pack, however, they can be truly frightening. (The sheer clatter of dice as you drop a handful of d20s for attack rolls is disturbing.) The exception to this "small but fast and many" rule involves horrors like an animated hand or the "facehugger" from Alien. The first is terrifying because it is so unnatural, the second because it can do worse than kill. As a final note, both are most frightening in an enclosed area with lots of nooks where they can hide.

Armor Class: Small but fast creatures normally work best with low AC ratings (AC 8, 9, or 10). Slow but tough creatures need high AC ratings (say AC 0 or even negative ratings). There are exceptions, of course. A small, metal, clockwork spider deserves a tough AC (though you shouldn't run it in packs), while a giant thing made of clay could make up for a weak AC by having a dozen hit dice or more.

Movement: Don't forget to make the movement rating match the monster's description. One saving grace of having to face an animated stone statue might be the ability to outrun the thing. In other words, it ought to have slower-than-human movement. How slow? Let flavor be your guide. On the other hand, a tiny creature is most frightening if you have no hope of escaping it, or of capturing it, if its speed is faster than human.

Hit Dice: As mentioned earlier, low ACs can be compensated by high hit dice. Small-but-fast monsters should almost always have few hit dice (1 or 2, perhaps), while slow-but-large ones should have many (perhaps as much as 10 or more).

THAC0: Slow creatures should have high THAC0s to reflect the trouble they have hitting. The higher the THAC0, the higher the damage rating you can afford to assign them. A 19 or 20 isn't out of the question. Fast creatures should have lower THAC0s, especially if they cause little damage with each hit. Consider giving them ratings as low as 10.

No. of Attacks: This rating must be considered in tandem with THAC0. A slow creature might have but one attack; or it might have more (to represent multiple limbs) if its THAC0 is high to compensate. Fast creatures can be made deadly by granting them multiple attacks each turn. (If an experienced fighter can strike more than once each turn with a sword, there is no reason not to allow a tiny monster multiple bites per turn, for instance.)

Damage/Attack: Once you have decided upon how often your monster attacks, and how accurate it is, it's time to decide how much damage it does. If a creature almost never connects, give it a bone-jarring damage rating. Keep in mind that larger dice don't guarantee more damage. A rating of 3d6 is usually better than 1d20, even though the averages are the same. If a creature almost always hits, even a rating of 1d4 can be frightening.

Special Attacks & Special Defenses: Here's your chance to be really creative. Let your monster's description suggest special effects for combat. Imagine that you are designing a creature of flame, for instance. A special attack might be an ability to flare, causing temporary blindness in its foes. A special defense might be that whenever a metal weapon strikes it, the weapon grows so heated that the wielder must make a saving throw to avoid dropping the thing. That's the sort of monster your players will remember long after!

Some Pitfalls of Monster Design

As anyone who has yawned through a bad B-movie can attest, there are certainly some wrong ways to go about creating a beastie. When you consider how many of Hollyweird's creatures fail to excite, even though they have visual impact going for them, and that roleplaying game masters have only the spoken word to convey their beasties, it is important to learn from the mistakes of others.

"Oh, No. (Yawn.) Look Out. It's Some Kind of Formless Blob Thing."

The formless blob works great for H.P. Lovecraft. (If you don't know who that is, you owe it to yourself to make a visit to the horror section of your local library or bookstore.) But over the years it has lost its impact in movies, and it's hard for anyone to get at all worked up over another shapeless slime in most roleplaying games. This makes a person wonder how Lovecraft gets so much mileage out of this sort of monster. The answer is two-fold.

First, Lovecraft is a master of understated description, of pointing obliquely at things lurking just at the corner of our vision. We believe him when he says that just a glimpse is enough to drive most men mad, so we know better than to look at the thing full on. Still, that idea is a little hard to convey in a roleplaying game, where everything has statistics and, as often as not, there's a metal miniature available for it. It's difficult to be frightened of any gelatinous being when it's only an inch tall, even if it is all abubble. No matter what they say, size does matter. The trick, then, is to bypass the stats and figures, and convey our creatures directly to our players' imaginations. This brings us to Lovecraft's second strength when it comes to monsters.

Notably, all of Lovecraft's creatures are firmly rooted in some sort of mythology and history. In other words, they aren't just shapeless blobs, because they have a background that a player character can research, if he or she is willing to read the right moldering tomes. We believe in and care about these creatures because they have evocative names, and because cultists worship them, and because they plague people whom we can understand and relate to. Formless though some might be, we still perceive these beings as individuals, with their own horrifying agendas.

Those movies that succeed with the formless blob theme do so because they make us believe in this particular blob as an individual, and make us care about the people it threatens. That's an important lesson to keep in mind for designing our own RPG monsters.

"But This One's Blue."

One mistake many people make when designing a new monster is to make it just a variation on an old theme. Red wolves, white trolls, and blue spiders just don't come across as mysterious and frightening just because they're a different color or have slightly different hit points. Not that an albino troll couldn't be interesting, if there were something else truly different about it, such as maybe a frosty touch. Imagine its skin popping with every move like cracking ice, and frost spreading from its feet with every step. No matter what its game stats, with even that short description, no player character is going to want to go near the thing.

Where this idea of variation on a theme can work best, however, is when it turns something safe and familiar into something monstrous. For instance, I consider the thought of cannibal halflings to be pretty disturbing. There is something uncomfortably unnatural about these tidy, cozy little people developing a craving for human flesh.

Be aware, however, that some creatures are so innocuous that they really can't be turned into an object of fear. I don't care how gigantic the rabbits are in Night of the Lepis, for instance, or how many people they kill. You just can't take the thought of a deadly bunny seriously, even if it is as big as a house and trampling DeForest Kelley's career.

The Monstrousness of Frankenstein's Monster

The real question is, who is the monster in this tale? Is it the corpse golem, seemingly an affront to Nature? Or is it the scientist who oversteps his bounds, then fails to accept responsibility for his creation?

Certainly Frankenstein's monster meets several of the criteria we have set, maybe even all of them. He is abnormally developed, a composite of human corpses, an idea repellent in its own right. He seems larger and stronger than a normal human, though in the book these may be attributed at least in part to his dramatic presence and ferocity. He somewhat meets the criterion of strange or terrifying shape: Shelley's first description of him is fairly hideous, though this is played down later in the novel. He is ugly (though the novel doesn't even suggest a flat head or bolts in the neck), and—in his vengeance—perhaps even wicked and cruel, though we may find it difficult to condemn him on these last, considering the weight of trouble he carries.

Frankenstein himself may be the worse monster, however. A father who abandons and even persecutes his child would certainly be judged a freak of nature by most people and would definitely be considered wicked and cruel.

Using a "Frankenstein's Monster" in Your Game

Fortunately, the themes of Frankenstein haven't been excessively used in roleplaying games. Game masters should be able to get a lot of mileage out of plaguing their player characters with patchwork monsters created from human corpses. That image is revolting enough to add some drama to whatever battles might result, especially if the PCs fear that, if any of them are killed, their own corpses might be carried off to be dismembered, pieced together with others, and reanimated. What's more, the very existence of these monsters means that somewhere, someone is creating them, so the adventurers automatically have a dark and mysterious enemy to seek out. Now add the discovery that some of these patchwork creatures might be more than simply an animated composite corpse—let the PCs come to realize

that these monsters are individuals who simply want to survive and make sense of their existence—and the evil of that hidden master becomes all the more dramatic, while the PCs must wrestle with their conscience every time they destroy another of these creatures. There is some great potential for roleplaying in that situation.

Grendel

In the famous Old English saga Beowulf, Danish King Hrothgar's hall has been plagued for a dozen years by a man-eating monster named Grendel, a cursed descendant of Cain (in the Old English) or Loki (according to Scandinavian legend). The creature is horribly strong, and no weapon can harm him. Night after night, the beast has broken into the hall after the warriors have feasted and fallen asleep, and he has killed a warrior and carried him off to eat, slaying anyone who tries to intervene. Hrothgar and his men have been helpless to stop the creature's raids, and a sense of hopeless doom has settled over them all.

Finally, a warrior by name of Beowulf visits from southern Sweden. Discovering how dispirited Hrothgar's household has become, Beowulf vows to slay the beast. But in their despair, the King Hrothgar and his warriors are less than impressed by Beowulf's vow, and amidst the usual courtesy afforded a guest, they vent some their misery upon the champion with sarcasm, suggesting that he is a foolish boaster. After all, they have come to believe that the beast cannot be slain.

Still, Beowulf prepares himself for the Grendel's visit that night, determined to destroy the creature and end the pall of terror over the hall. When Grendel comes sneaking in and slays another warrior, Beowulf—who has the strength of twenty men—grapples the creature and will not let him go. In the end, Grendel escapes only by tearing off his own arm to break Beowulf's hold. Fleeing back to his lair beneath a lake, he then dies of the wound.

The story doesn't end there, however. In a turn of events that would do Hollywood proud, Grendel's monstrous mother comes to wreak vengeance upon the man who has slain her son. She arrives after King Hrothgar and his men have held a feast to celebrate the slaying of Grendel, and they are sleeping off the effects of the revelry. Unexpectedly, the vengeful mother breaks in upon them, kills another warrior, and flees.

This time, turning events around, Beowulf follows the monster home. After a ferocious battle, he cuts off her head with a mysterious sword found in her lair, and returns to Hrothgar's hall the next day, where a second celebration is held.

Eventually, Beowulf inherits the kingdom. Later, as an old king, he dies while slaying a dragon that has come to plague the land.

The Monstrousness of Grendel

Why is Grendel monstrous? There are several contributing reasons.

First, like the Cyclops, Grendel violates the ancient host-guest relationship. But whereas the Cyclops is an evil, ungracious host, Grendel is an uninvited, violent guest who takes what he wants and then flees with it. In the harsh world of early Scandinavia, the communal hall was one of the only havens where a person might feel safe. But with Grendel invading that hall at will, it is no longer a haven. Instead, it is a place of despair.

Second, the power of Grendel is horrible. Larger than a man, strong enough to kill a warrior in bare moments then carry him off to be eaten, and impervious to weapons, Grendel is a titan in power, if not an actual giant in size. It isn't surprising that King Hrothgar and his men are despondent with terror at the beast's continual raids. In effect, they have become little more than a larder for Grendel, a virtual flock of sheep or goats from which he can feed at will. Nothing is more unnerving and horrifying for a warrior than helplessness. This reason alone is sufficient to make Grendel a monster.

Finally, there is a cruelty and cunning to Grendel that makes him a monster. A descendent of either Cain or Loki, the creature is not merely an animal; he bears a certain humanity, yet he eats human flesh. Unlike a bear or other animal that might strike when the opportunity arises, Grendel uses his wiles to strike during the night, waiting for his victims to sleep, and he seems to enjoy the chaos and suffering he causes nearly as much as the meat he gains.

Using a "Grendel" in Your Game

For a roleplaying campaign, a creature like Grendel makes an excellent and unusual monster. Chances are, the player characters have never encountered a beast that preys upon people in their own homes, again and again, as if they were somehow his property and he had a god-given right to treat them as he wished. That no one else has been able to stop him should give the adventurers pause, as well. If they are going to have any chance of besting this beast, they will need to be better than anyone else in the area being preyed upon.

When designing a monster like this, then, take into account the abilities of your player characters. For adventures involving greener PCs, a village makes a good setting for a "Grendel," because it isn't much of a stretch to imagine the player characters as more capable than the villagers. But by the same token, it can be very effective to have a "Grendel" plague a major population center when the PCs are much more experienced and well known. Their renown places them in a position where they can hardly refuse any request for aid, but the obvious might of the monster should make the players at least a little nervous that they have a chance of losing a character to it.

As a final piece of advice, if you decide to use such a beast, don't wimp out. Make it a killer. Design its abilities so that the PCs can best it if they work together and plan ahead. But if they make a serious mistake or run off "half cocked," don't be afraid to kill or maim one of them. Without danger, there is no excitement. You might want to warn your players that, when it comes to this creature, "The kid gloves are off." That in itself should make them feel at least a little fear.

Lester Smith is the pseudonym for an otherworldly creature who travels from one reality to another in a constant search for the twin chills of horror and ice cream. Don't look now, but he's standing right behind you. Too late. He's gone.

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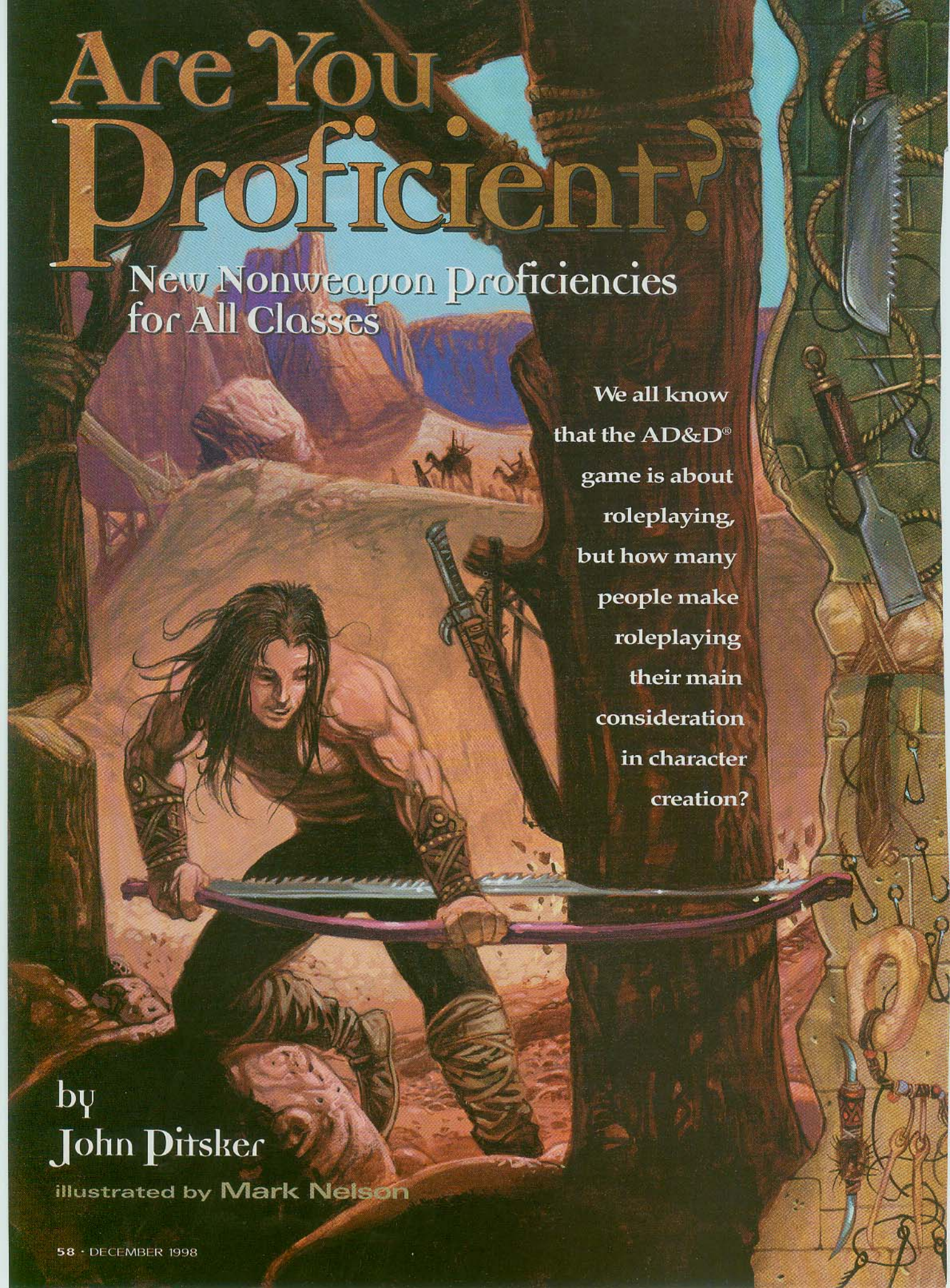
Are You Proficient?

New Nonweapon Proficiencies for All Classes



We all know that the AD&D® game is about roleplaying, but how many people make roleplaying their main consideration in character creation?

by John Pitsker

illustrated by Mark Nelson

Susan might be the **greatest advocate of role-playing there is, but when it comes time for her to pick between cooking, fishing, or blind-fighting, which does she choose? She remembers her last character being sliced up by drow while flailing her sword about in the dark, and she picks blind-fighting. It is often the more experienced player who, instead of fleshing out his character to make her well rounded and interesting, chooses only those nonweapon proficiencies that give her the greatest edge in life-or-death situations. This practice is commonly known as min-maxing, and it can make for difficult roleplaying.**

Let's say that a player has a fighter named Borak who is specialized with the two-handed sword, and he has blind-fighting and endurance as nonweapon proficiencies. What does poor Borak do when there's not an exhausting battle in utter darkness to be found? Push-ups?

Actually that's not a bad idea, and many good roleplayers can take a one-dimensional character like Borak and still manage to squeeze a lot of interesting activities out of him. Borak likes to stay in shape, so he exercises. He also sharpens his sword, practices fighting blindfolded (well away from the campfire, of course!), and does whatever else he can do to prepare himself for the next battle, whenever it comes.

However, one with a true love for roleplaying would not necessarily create a character like Borak. Some AD&D games consist of nothing but combat, but many involve a lot of travel, visits to towns and villages, conversations with strange beings from other planes, and various other situations that don't call for a sword slash. Many players feel a need to make their character someone who might be interesting to hang around with, not someone who is constantly running a whetstone along her blade.

Some sort of artistic ability rounds out Borak's personality nicely. While the wizards in the party take out their spellbooks to study, Borak can lay aside his sword and take out his sketch book. Or, if drawing is too sensitive for the tough fighter, maybe he is a dedicated runner. While spells are being prayed for, Borak is doing morning stretches to go on a short run—out of armor, of course.

Nonweapon proficiencies provide opportunities for roleplaying, given a little creative thought. The DM should encourage this sort of behavior by awarding an experience bonus for good roleplaying, creating situations where the solution requires the use of a seldom used nonweapon proficiency, or by giving a better chance to succeed at a proficiency check if the character has been practicing, like Borak with his morning jogs. If the character has been consistently using his proficiency in roleplaying situations, and then has to make a check in an emergency situation, the DM can give him a +1 bonus to succeed. This adds a level of realism to the game and brings a player closer to his character. It can also lead to many interesting game complications. What if, while out on his morning run, Borak stumbles across a party of goblins harassing a captive elf? What does he do? He has no armor, and he certainly wouldn't be jogging with his two-handed sword. Situations like these are the natural extension of creative roleplaying and nonweapon proficiency use.

The following are some additional nonweapon proficiencies, including a new category of broad-based proficiencies designed to be useful in gaming situations while also lending themselves to roleplaying. These new proficiencies do not solve the problem of min-maxing on their own; if the DM is not careful, the proficiencies presented here could even contribute to the problem. The player, with guidance from her DM, must ensure that her character is as well rounded as possible. So choose your proficiencies carefully, and save the one-dimensional characters for the action movies.

Proficiency Descriptions

Dark Sense: The character has an uncanny ability, if moving at half speed or less, to sense objects or empty space in complete darkness. This requires total concentration, and so is useless in combat. Using this ability, the character could navigate through a dark room,

New Nonweapon Proficiencies

General

Proficiency	# slots	Ability	Modifier
Cartwright	1	Strength	0
Epicure	2	Intelligence	+2
Fasting	1	Constitution	–1
Grooming (animal)	1	Wisdom	0
Grooming (humanoid)	1	Wisdom	0
Jewelry Making	2	Dexterity	–2
Rope Making	1	Dexterity	0
Storytelling	1	Charisma	0
Time Sense	1	Wisdom	0
Waterproofing	1	Intelligence	–1

Priest

Proficiency	# slots	Ability	Modifier
Magic Energy Conservation	2	N/A	N/A
Organic Preservation	1	Intelligence	–1
Psychology	2	Wisdom	–2
Quick Tongue	3	Dexterity	–1
Vision Quest	2	Wisdom	–3

Rogue

Proficiency	# slots	Ability	Modifier
Dark Sense	2	Wisdom	–2
Dirty Fighting	2	Dexterity	–3
Sabotage	1	Intelligence	–1

Warrior

Proficiency	# slots	Ability	Modifier
Dark Sense	2	Wisdom	–2
Dirty Fighting	2	Dexterity	–3
Vision Quest	2	Wisdom	–3
Weapon Sharpening	1	Intelligence	–1

Wizard

Proficiency	# slots	Ability	Modifier
Magic Energy Conservation	2	N/A	N/A
Organic Preservation	1	Intelligence	–1
Quick Tongue	3	Dexterity	–1

Broad-based Proficiencies

Proficiency	# slots	Ability	Modifier
Architecture	3	Intelligence	/2
Languages	3	Intelligence	/2
Monster Lore	3	Intelligence	/2
Naturalist	3	Intelligence	/2
Politics	3	Intelligence	/2
Race Lore	3	Intelligence	/2

avoiding collisions with furniture and stopping before stepping into a gaping pit. The DM should require a roll whenever the character comes close to something that could be sensed. Success means that the character is aware that his path is either blocked by an object or that there is no solid ground at his feet. Failures are obvious because of the resulting collision or plunge.

Dirty Fighting: A character with this proficiency is familiar with a number of cheap shots and tricks that can be used in fighting. This proficiency should never be taken by anyone who must uphold any sort of moral code. A paladin, for example, would never resort to dirty fighting unless he wanted to lose favor with his deity. Whenever a player wants his character to use this ability, he should state what his character is attempting to do, then make a proficiency check. Success means that the trick worked, and the character gains an extra attack in that round at +2 to hit and damage. Failure means that the move was noticed or anticipated, and the intended victim gains an extra attack in that round against the character, who enjoys no Dexterity bonus to his armor class for that attack only. After the first attempt, a cumulative –2 penalty should be applied to any further attempts made against the same opponent. For example, Krik the thief is fighting a city guard. He scoops up a handful of sand (rolls a successful proficiency check) and throws it in the guard's eyes. As the guard yells in pain and rubs his eyes, Krik gives him a nasty cut with his dagger. The fight continues, and Krik attempts to kick the guard in the shin. This time, the proficiency check is made with a –2 penalty, as the guard has grown wary of Krik's cheap shots. Krik misses (fails his check); as he recovers his footing, the guard smashes him with his mace.

Epicure: This character is an expert in food and drink, and can tell (on a successful proficiency check) whether food has been prepared by a master chef, what ingredients were used, what year a specific wine was bottled, and what region it came from. If this character also has the cooking skill, then no proficiency check is required to prepare a masterful meal.

Fasting: This proficiency allows a character to go long periods without food, though liquids are still necessary. Any amount of time under one week spent fasting causes no ill effects to the character. At one week, a proficiency check is required. Success means that the character suffers no ill effects and loses 5 lbs. Failure means that the character temporarily loses one point from Strength and one point from Constitution as well as 10 lbs. The character's weight will not fall below 15 lbs per foot of height.

At the end of each week after the first, the character must make a proficiency check at a cumulative penalty of –1. If the character's Strength or Constitution falls below 1, the character dies. Once the character is able or decides to end the fast, he must begin to eat slowly. Each day following the fast the character

recovers one point each of Strength and Constitution, and may only eat normally once fully recovered. Lost weight may be regained after this time if desired.

This can be used as a survival technique, though it is most often used in religious or mystical situations. The DM should consider granting a bonus where applicable to any character who chooses to fast before performing some sort of religious or mystical activity. The longer the fast, the larger the bonus.

Grooming (animal): This character is adept in grooming a specific species of animal that must be chosen when the proficiency is taken. This can be used to increase the price of an animal for sale, or simply to make the specific animal look and feel its best. For instance, after a hard ride Gallaina might choose to spend an hour in the stable giving her horse a thorough rub-down and hoof cleaning. Or Blent always gets the best price for his champion wardogs because he spends extra time cleaning and trimming their coats.

Grooming (humanoid): This character knows how to make people look good or bad through the use of makeup, hair styling, and clothing. A character with the grooming proficiency can temporarily increase or decrease his or another character's Charisma by 2 (maximum 18), affecting the reactions of those able to view the character. This improvement can last anywhere from an hour to a full day, depending on the character's activity and the elements (DM's discretion). This proficiency also gives a +2 bonus to disguise proficiency checks.

Jewelry Making: A character with this proficiency is capable of producing works of jewelry, given the proper tools, workplace, and materials. Proper use of the proficiency requires a complete workshop. The building cost varies according to the character's needs, but the tools involved are expensive and difficult to get. A basic set of tools can cost anywhere from 2,000 to 6,000 gp, and more elaborate jewelry may require more exotic tools. The DM should determine what is needed and be careful to balance the cost with the potential profit.

The time required to make an item varies and should be determined by the player and his DM. After the allotted work time has expired, a proficiency check should be made. If a natural 20 is rolled, then the piece is ruined and the materials are wasted. Any other failed check means that the item is flawed in some way that anyone with the appraising proficiency can detect and is worth only the cost of materials.

If the proficiency check is successful, multiply the cost of materials by 100% plus 10% for each point by which the check succeeded. For instance, Bargar the gnome wishes to make a ring out of a particularly nice topaz he has acquired. The topaz is worth 500 gp, and he uses 20 gp worth of platinum. The DM decides that, to do a fine job, Bargar must spend one week working on this item. At the end of this week, a proficiency check is made. Bargar has a Dexterity of 16, so he needs a 14 to succeed. He rolls a 9, succeeding with a margin of five points. This means that Bargar now has a nice ring that he can keep or sell for 780 gp, 150% the cost of materials.

Magical Energy Conservation: Only priests and wizards may take this proficiency. It allows the spellcaster to conserve energy that might normally be wasted during spellcasting, collecting it for use as cantrips or orisons (if the optional rules from *Player's Option®: Spells & Magic* are used). Each day, a character with this proficiency may cast one cantrip or orison per spell level they have attained at no additional cost. This means that a 7th-level mage with this proficiency would be able to cast four cantrips per day, whereas a 4th-level cleric could use two orisons per day.

Organic Preservation: Organic materials come from plants and animals, and have a habit of decomposing once the life process has been interrupted. A character with this proficiency is experienced in using materials and processes that can prolong the usefulness of these organic substances. Whether it is properly wrapping and sealing food so that it won't spoil, using a certain tree sap to preserve a spell component, or pickling a baby cockatrice in a specimen jar, this character knows how to keep things from rotting. The amount of time for which these things may be preserved varies and should be determined by the DM. The shelf-life of wrapped or sealed materials may be extended to up to three times as long, whereas something preserved in chemicals may be kept indefinitely.

Psychology: This character is familiar with the twistings and turnings of the

mind and can use this knowledge to heal or harm other people. A character with this proficiency can treat madness and phobias or help modify psychopathic or sociopathic behavior. This is not an automatic cure-all, and copious amounts of time would be necessary to help someone who is deeply insane. Each case should be determined by the DM based on the time spent and the Intelligence of the person undergoing treatment. It is not uncommon for a patient to fool his psychologist by pretending to be cured.

This skill has also been used by those of lesser moral virtue to attempt to brainwash victims, or as an aid to torture or interrogation. Good or neutral characters who use this proficiency in such a manner might find their alignment changed.

This can also be used to aid characters who are under a *fear* or *charm* spell. At the DM's discretion, a successful proficiency check allows the affected character to make an additional saving throw. If no saving throw is normally allowed, then the affected character may save at –2. This can be attempted only once per character in any given situation.

Lastly, a character with this proficiency is a scholar of human (or humanoid) motivations and behavior. If he knows a specific individual, the character can make a proficiency check to guess that individual's motives in any given situation or to sense whether that person is being dishonest or deceptive. He also has a chance (equal to half of his normal proficiency check) of applying the same ability to a stranger. This proficiency also grants a +1 bonus to any proficiency where deception might be involved (i.e., disguise, haggling, story telling, etc.).

Quick Tongue: This proficiency is designed for the mage or priest who wants to cast a spell just a little quicker than usual. A character with this proficiency is able to speak quickly when required and may attempt to do so during spellcasting. When preparing to cast any spell, a character who makes a successful proficiency check can reduce the casting time of the spell by 2 (to a minimum of 1). A failed check means that the character has a 25% chance of mispronouncing the spell in haste, causing the attempted spell to be flubbed and lost.

Rope Making: This proficiency enables the character to create thread, yarn, string, twine, or rope from animal or plant materials. Given the proper materials and time, no proficiency check is required. If the character is attempting to create rope out of scavenged materials such as wild vines, then a secret check is made by the DM. Failure means that there is a weak point in the rope, and it has a 50% chance of breaking during use. Proper testing can reveal this weakness, given time.

Sabotage: This proficiency allows the character to plan or cause a malfunction in a construct or machine or to cause the collapse of a portion of a building. This can be as simple as rigging a crossbow to misfire or a wagon wheel to fall off or as complex as collapsing a tower. The time involved depends on the complexity and size of the object. A failed check means that the object is obviously damaged, or that the sabotage failed completely, whichever the DM thinks would disadvantage the character most. Also, the DM should give additional penalties for more complicated contraptions or larger structures. A wagon wheel, for example, would not require additional penalties. A catapult, however, may require an additional penalty of –2, being a larger and more complicated object. Causing the potential collapse of a stone tower would require much time and elaborate efforts (removal of stones or tunneling), at the end of which a –5 penalty should be applied to the proficiency check.

Story Telling: This character can spin a dramatic story about a chosen topic. If the story is about a specific person, then reaction to that person can be modified on a successful proficiency check. If the person in the story is portrayed as heroic, then the listeners see him as heroic. If the story describes his villainous deeds, then they see him as a villain. The DM may adjust a listener's reaction based on the listener's Wisdom and how well the listener knows the subject of the story. If the character sings the story as a ballad, or tells the story to musical accompaniment, he may add a +1 bonus to his proficiency check. Combining singing and instrumentation allows a +2 to the check.

This proficiency also allows a character to weave a believable lie. A successful proficiency check, modified by the listener's magical defense adjustment, means that a given statement is believed by the listener. The DM is encouraged, however, to modify the proficiency check further according to the statement's outlandishness. For instance, only the extremely gullible believe that the character has just stuffed an entire black dragon into a belt pouch.

Time Sense: This character is always able to give a reasonably close approximation of the time and has a chance (on a successful proficiency check) of being able to tell how much time has elapsed during an interval of unconsciousness. This proficiency is based on an internal biological clock, not observation of the natural world, and so functions even when the character is underground or completely enclosed. If the character is on another plane where time operates differently than on his home plane, this proficiency does not function until he returns to his home plane and spends at least one week adjusting to the normal flow of time.

Vision Quest: A character with this proficiency may undertake a vision quest to seek an answer to any question. This vision quest may be performed no more than once per week and involves elaborate rituals and special materials, both of which are a reflection of the religious beliefs of the seeker. The exact contents of these rituals should be discussed with the DM at the time that this proficiency is chosen. Usually it involves hours of prayer and chanting, sometimes with a musical instrument, and sometimes a small sacrifice is required. The time allotted to this activity should not exceed six hours, however.

At the end of the rituals, a secret proficiency check should be made by the DM. A natural 20 means that whatever god or spirit the character was trying to contact is angered at his presumption and sends him a false vision. Otherwise, a failed roll indicates that nothing happens. Success means that the character receives some sort of vision, usually cryptic, which, upon reflection, should provide enlightenment about the subject of the question.

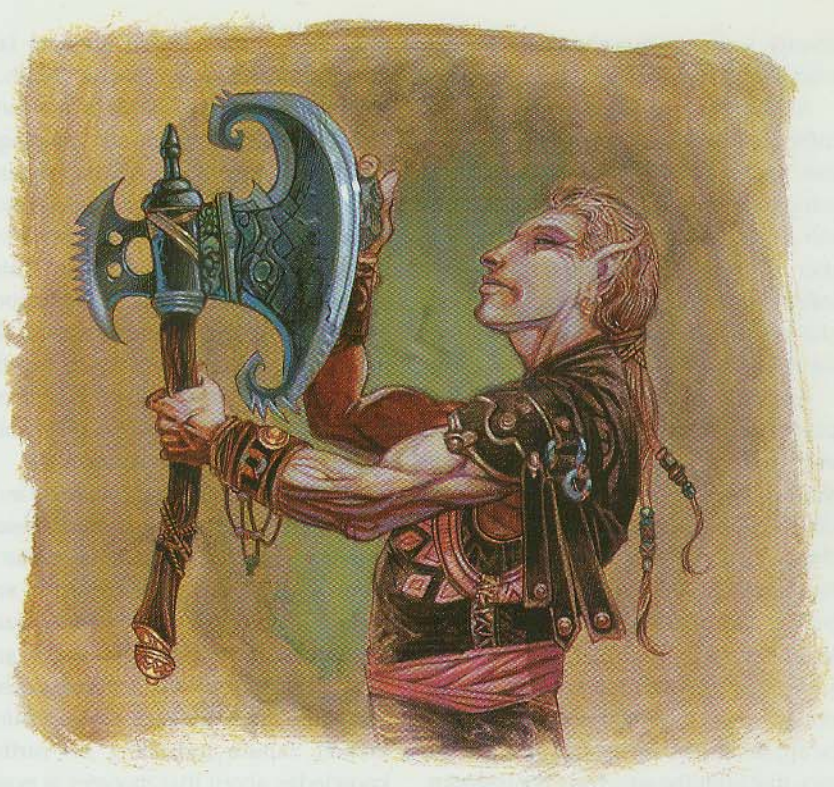
For example, Korag the barbarian warrior is concerned about the fact that he and his friends are contemplating the exploration of an ancient temple. Though the temple is long destroyed and was dedicated to another god, he is

worried that he might anger the spirits that might still live there, so he goes on a vision quest that night. He wanders away from his friends and spends the night by his solitary fire, chanting and beating a small drum. When the sun rises, he throws some food into his fire as a sacrifice and awaits his vision. The DM makes a secret roll, which is successful, and Korag is granted a vision where he sees the temple as it once was, the happy people worshipping, and the dark horde that raided and defiled it. He sees the worshippers screaming in agony and reaching their arms toward him. When he returns, he discusses his vision with his friends, and they decide that the souls of the dead worshippers might need their help to be put to rest. This interpretation might seem obvious, but often the most obvious interpretation is not the correct one.

Fasting before a vision quest is a helpful way to prepare and grants a +1 bonus to the proficiency check for every three days spent fasting.

Waterproofing: This proficiency enables a character to use special ingredients (tree sap, bee's wax, oils, etc.) to waterproof such materials as leather, cloth, or wood. This can be used to ensure that a cloak sheds rain or that a protective cover keeps a spellbook dry. Such protection needs to be reapplied every week to items that are frequently exposed to water. Other items need upkeep once a month or so. The DM should make a proficiency check in secret and note whether the water proofing was successful or not. This protects items that are fully submerged only if the waterproofed container is completely sealed.

Weapon Sharpening: A character with this proficiency is adept at honing a blade to its finest possible edge. This works on any type S or P weapon. The character must spend half an hour sharpening the edged weapon with a fine quality whetstone (1 sp). At the end of this time, the character must make a proficiency check. Failure means that the character hasn't done it quite right and must devote another half-hour followed by another check. Success means that the blade is at its sharpest and functions with a +1 bonus to hit and damage for the next three attacks, after which time it loses its fine edge and needs resharpening. A character with the weaponsmithing nonweapon proficiency may also sharpen weapons and is capable of achieving this same effect without having to make a proficiency check.



Broad-based Nonweapon Proficiencies

These proficiencies are designed for the intellectual character who doesn't want to be a specialist and would rather have a wide experience in a specific topic. Just as a character is capable of becoming proficient in a broad group of weapons, so too is that character able to become proficient in a broad field of knowledge. These proficiencies are designed to represent the broad knowledge gained by intellectual characters from their formal education or time spent in libraries. The list below is by no means complete and may be expanded as players and DMs see fit. Because of their high proficiency slot cost and their low chance of success, these proficiencies are usually taken only by characters who have proficiency slots to spare, perhaps as bonus slots from high Intelligence. The chance for success with these proficiencies cannot be improved unless the character's Intelligence increases, in which case the chance for success is still half the character's Intelligence, rounded down.

Because of the drawbacks involved, a player might find it difficult to justify giving his character one of these proficiencies. With this in mind, the DM should allow a proficiency check for any situation that might fall in the character's field of knowledge, even if the player does not ask for it. Like an elf who passes by a secret door, the character with a broad-based nonweapon proficiency might notice something that would be overlooked otherwise. This can be modified by the DM based on the rarity of the given situation. See the chart below for modifiers.

Modifiers for Broad-based Proficiency Checks

Frequency	Modifier
Common	0
Uncommon	–2
Rare	–4
Very Rare	–6

These modifiers should be applied to any of the broad-based proficiencies, though a natural 1 should always indicate success. If a piece of information is so obscure as to be nearly impossible for even a scholar to know, then the DM should require a 1 to be rolled. There is

always a chance that the character has read about it somewhere.

An attempt to access any specific information requires one round, and failure means that the character cannot remember ever reading about that subject. Once an attempt has failed, no further attempts may be made on that information until the character has had a chance to visit a large library and study for at least a week.

Architecture: A character with this proficiency is familiar with many different styles of architecture, as well as famous buildings in large or ancient cities. He has a chance to know many things given close examination of a particular structure, including the race that built it and how long it has been standing. Other facts could be more specific, such as important rooms, secret or concealed doors, traps, etc. Modifiers might be applied based on the frequency of the race that built the structure. For instance, a dwarven temple would be easier for a character to identify than one built by the locathah. The character is granted a +2 bonus to identify structures built by his own race.

Languages: This character has spent his lifetime studying languages and their origins. On a successful proficiency check, the character picks up a few words of a conversation or manages to say a word in a language with which he is not otherwise familiar. Modifiers apply to the frequency of the race in question. For instance, Jelure listens at a door and hears a harsh guttural language that she recognizes as Orcish, a common language. She does not have Orcish as one of her chosen languages and so makes a proficiency check against her broad-based language proficiency. It is successful, and she is able to make out the words "prisoner" and "door." Later, she runs across some gnolls, an uncommon race. As they come to attack, she makes a check at –2 to try to say the word "friend" in Gnollish. Her check fails, and her cry of "cheese" does nothing to stop the gnolls from attacking.

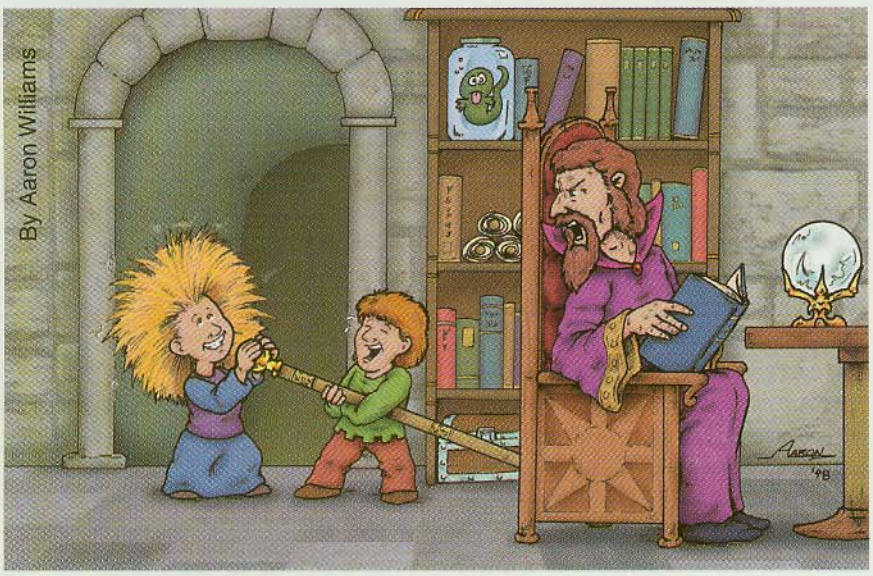
Monster Lore: This proficiency indicates a long study of unnatural monsters of many types. It enables the character to identify any monsters correctly and gives a chance to know various facts about these monsters, their attacks, and their weaknesses. A separate check should be made for each piece of information, failure indicating no further knowledge about that monster is possible without more study. Modifiers apply to the frequency of the monster. This proficiency is not as useful in combat situations as it might first appear. For example, Glinn and her party run across a strange creature. She spends an entire round trying to remember if she has read about this beast. By the time she rolls her proficiency check and proclaims that it spits acid, the rest of her party is well aware of that fact.

Naturalist: This character has studied nature from the comforts of a library and has collected bits of knowledge about the natural world. This proficiency grants an academic understanding of plants and their uses, animals and their habits, and the rudiments of outdoor survival. Modifiers apply depending on how far the character is from his homeland.

This differs from the hands-on education represented by the survival skill. Naturalists can make do in the wilderness without the more specific skill, but they aren't that comfortable. Naturalists are likely to know why a Faerûnian flying squirrel only nests in a specific type of tree but less likely to know where to build their lean-to. This also confers a +2 bonus to the more specialized survival proficiency.

Politics: This proficiency allows a character to understand the political situation of any given area and to recognize the main political figures and their proclivities. This character could walk into a town and have a chance to know what the political climate is like, who is the mayor or local lord, and any unusual rules. Modifiers apply depending on how far a character is from his homeland, how small the town or kingdom is, or both. Large kingdoms, even in distant lands, add no modifiers to the proficiency check, as they should be well known to any scholar.

Race Lore: This character is knowledgeable about the common humanoid races of the campaign setting. This proficiency allows a chance to know the general history, major political figures, bits of language, legends, and whatever else might come up in play. The modifiers for this proficiency are difficult to pin down and should be judged on a case by case basis. If the character is attempting to remember the name of a famous elven diplomat, there should be little or no penalty. Trying to guess the name of a priestess in an obscure gnomish temple, however, should be nearly impossible and carry a stiff penalty.



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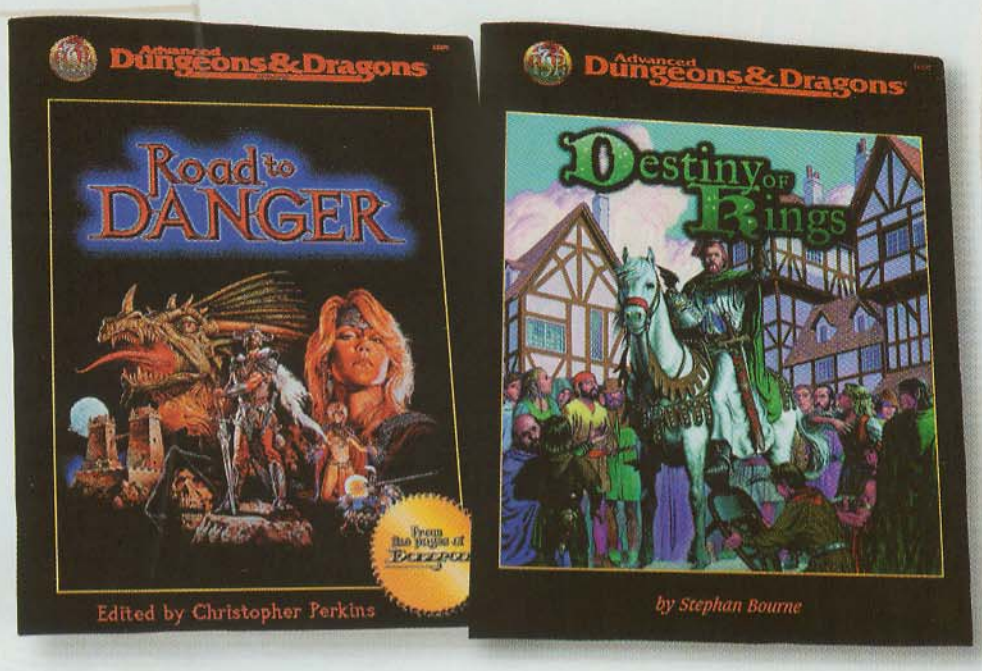

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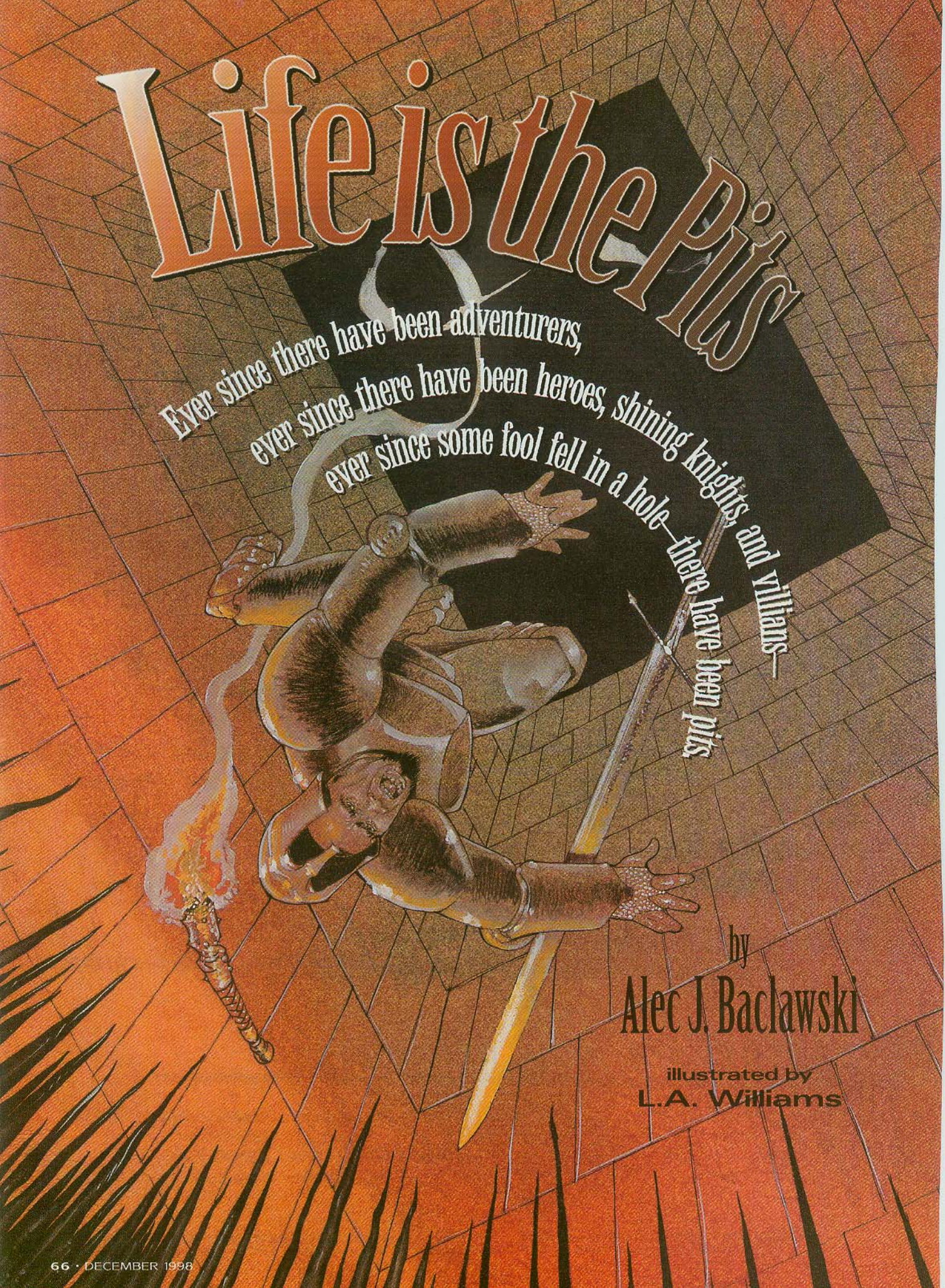
Life is the Pits

Ever since there have been adventurers, ever since there have been heroes, shining knights, and villains— ever since some fool fell in a hole—there have been pits



by
Alec J. Baclawski

illustrated by
L.A. Williams

Pits are an adventuring staple,

a cliffhanger of the most basic kind. Pits were often seen as a foil for heroes in serials of the '30s. In books, roleplaying, and real life castles, pits can be as simple as a hole dug in the ground, or as complex as a resetting hinged-lid oubliette with smooth walls that crush victims into goo. In the AD&D® game, with its strange creatures and the limitless possibilities of magic, pits can be the ultimate DM's tool.

All too often, PCs simply spot a pit and circumvent it, or they trigger it and yawn as the leader falls ten feet and suffers 1d6 hp damage—perhaps impaling himself on a spike or two. This is a shame considering the numerous variations possible in a fantasy setting. Pits can be a nuisance, a puzzle, a damaging obstacle, or just simply fatal. The Pit Trap Cards found in *The Ruins of Undermountain* boxed set contained a number of ingenious new pit types. What this article presents is an expanded list of pits, pit lids, and pit triggers for use in any campaign. Also included are tables to allow a DM to quickly and randomly generate pits for dungeon design or on the spot during a castle raid or dungeon crawl.

Each pit description starts with the name of the type of pit, a standard depth, a random depth range to keep PCs guessing, a general description, and a listing and description of any sub-types. **Table 1** lists the basic pit types, and each entry specifies other tables suggested for fleshing out a pit, including tables on Type of Lid and Debris & Denizens (if any). Any magical effects should be treated as if cast at the minimum level required unless otherwise stated.

Keep a Lid On It!

A pit is most effective when it takes an intruder by surprise, and that means hiding it somehow. Lids are generally the way to go, allowing the pit to look like a part of the normal floor or ground until it is too late. Other times an open pit with an obvious peril within is an equally useful deterrent to intruders, especially if the pit is made harder to traverse than normal. What follows are the most common pit lids, as found on **Table 2**. Most pit lids can withstand 50 hp damage before being revealed as lids and allowing air and light to pass. It requires 75 hp damage to make a hole big enough for a man-sized creature to pass through. Most lids can withstand 100 or more points before being totally destroyed. (Keep in mind that debris falls into a pit—and onto the comrade you're trying to free. Falling rocks hurt). Damage must be caused by blunt weapons, stoneworking tools, or some applicable special or magical attack. (Magical darts wouldn't do much, but a breath weapon or bolt of fire might.)

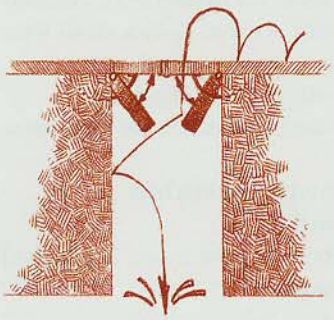


Fig. 1 Central Latch Lid

Central Latch

This form of lid splits along its center (normally either parallel or perpendicular to the passage it's in, though some rare few split along an X seam into four equally sized quarters) into two equal halves, generally dropping victims almost directly into the center of the pit. This lid makes it difficult for victims to arrest their fall, as they are equidistant from walls and pit edges when the lid is triggered (imposing a –4 penalty to any rolls allowed to leap away or catch oneself). Most such lids are triggered by a certain amount of weight (usually 100 to 150 lbs. or more), though many are also triggered by outside sources—like a lever or the opening of the door in front of the pit. Fifty percent of these lids reset themselves magically or mechanically within 1 turn, consequently severing or breaking any object with a strength less than iron or steel (like ropes, poles, ladders, or limbs) caught between the slabs.

Edge Latch

This variation on the central latch instead causes the lid to swing away as a single piece in any one direction. All checks to leap away or catch a wall are made at –2, unless the victim is specifically trying to grab the lid, in which case the penalty is at –4 due to the shocking force with which the lid impacts the pit wall. A side effect of the slamming lid is the great deal of noise it creates, thus increasing the chance of attracting wandering monsters. Edge latch lids are generally triggered in the same fashion as central latch lids. Most are reset manually by guards or (10%) magically, as most hidden mechanisms don't have the leverage to push the single massive lid back into place. A closing edge latch lid

Table 1: Pit Types

1–10	**Standard Pit.** Roll on Tables 2, 3 ,4.
11–13	**Spike Pit.** Roll on Tables 2, 3, 4 (–3 to all rolls).
14	**Flip Pit.** Roll again on this table using 1d12 plus **Table 2.**
15	**Lumberjack Pit.** Roll on Tables 3 & 4 if appropriate.
16	Crusher Pit. Roll on **Table 4** (+20 to roll).
17	**Paranoia Pit.** See pit descriptions to determine appropriate tables to roll on.
18	**Illusion Pit.**
19	**Gravity Pit.**
20	**Roll twice** ignoring 20; link pits in sequence, one after the other in a corridor or one below the other (i.e., the floor of the first is the lid of the next) or DM's choice.

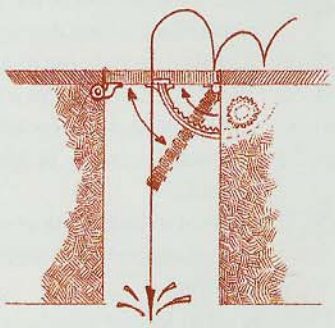


Fig. 2 Edge Latch Lid

Table 2: Lid Type

1–4	Central Latch Lid
5–8	Edge Latch Lid
9–12	Breakaway
13–14	Teeter-totter
15	Illusory
16–19	Open
20	DM's choice

Table 3: Pit Debris (roll 1d4 times on this table)

1–8	1d6 bent coins (roll 1d8: 1–3 copper; 4–5 silver; 6–7 electrum; 8 gilt-painted lead) or nothing
9–15	1d4+3 broken, gnawed at bones (may serve as poor clubs, Dmg 1d4) or bottom 3 feet of pit is filled with offal and garbage (45% chance of catching some kind of disease)
16–18	Small pile of tattered, rotting rags and leather or a stick bearing *Nystul's magic aura*
19	A complete human skeleton wearing broken armor (scale, ring, chain or splint), bearing a nicked long sword, two other random weapons, and carrying a backpack containing shattered glass, ripped bandages, a bent grappling hook, and 30 feet of silk rope or a ball of twine
20–22	A rusty but serviceable dagger (will break on a natural 1–3 in combat)
23–24	A pile of gray-green mold (underneath is either (1–2) a small wheel of cheese or (3–4) old fruit)
25–27	A small, cracked humanoid skull (possibly kobold or goblin)
28	A neatly stacked pile of 2d12 large spider exoskeletons (or other insects or rodent skeletons)
29	1d3 random 10 gp gems or a hand axe with a broken haft
30–32	A small, broken hand-cask of 3d10 iron nails.
33–36	A small steel flask (roll 1d4: 1–2 contains normal water; 3 contains holy water; 4 contains one dose of Type D poison)
37	1d3 severed, desiccated human hands
38–42	A spiked buckler or a small metal mirror
43–57	The entire bottom of the pit is filled with dirty feathers to a depth of two feet (reduce falling damage by 2 hp)
58–60	A broken ceramic jug or a crushed tin camp cup
61–62	The skeletal remains of a 10'-long snake or a pair of throwing knives
63–67	All the pit walls are covered in grease, oil, or lard.
68–74	A simple brass ring or 3d4 keys on a simple iron ring or some burned out torch stubs
75–77	A blood stained cloak of otherwise good quality or 2d4 large sharp teeth
78	A mud stained left boot or phosphorescent mold on the walls (light as by *faerie fire*)
79–83	A small leather pouch, holding (roll 1d4: 1–2 a pair of bone dice; 3 a talis deck; 4 a single chess piece)
84	2d4 hard tack biscuits, still fresh (as fresh as hard tack can be, anyway)
85–86	A stylish, black felt hat with a hole through its back and front
87–89	3d4 broken wooden ladder rungs or 2d4 arrows
90–92	A 5'-long wooden pole, broken at one end, or a blood-stained glove
93	A tradesman's hammer and a single iron spike
94–95	An empty canvas sack or a 15'-length of rope (severed at one end)
96	A bent and dented silver amulet with a snapped chain (15 gp)
97–99	A rusty helm or coif or several large reptilian scales
100	An ivory scroll case (what it contains is up to the DM)
101+	DM's choice

Table 4: Pit Denizens

1–5	No denizen
6	2d6 normal rats or 1d6 giant centipedes
7	Yellow mold or a son of kyuss
8	Green slime or 1d4+2 giant rats
9	Gelatinous cube or a rust monster
10–11	2d4 skeletons or a glyptar
12	1d6 zombies or 1d2 peltast
13	Brown mold or 3d4 giant ticks
14	Flesh golem or 3d4 fire beetles
15	Coffer corpse or a choke creeper
16	1d3 juju zombies or a clay golem
17–18	1d3 monster skeletons or 3d10+10 crawling claws
19	1d2 monster zombies or 2d4 violet fungi
20	Gas spore or otyugh

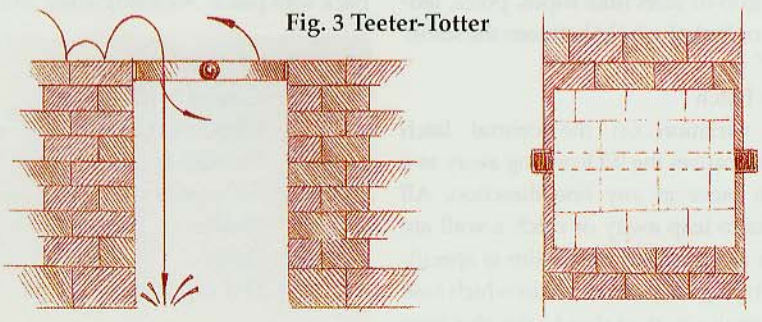


Fig. 3 Teeter-Totter

has the same ability to sever objects caught between it and the pit edge as does a central latch.

Breakaway

This lid is reminiscent of woodland animal traps updated for stone and packed earth settings. The breakaway lid is normally a light wooden lattice or netting covered by dirt or thin plaques of stone to resemble the local ground or floor. It can also be mortared but unsupported lightweight stone—although this version rarely survives long in ruins. This form of lid can support no more than 15 to 25 lbs. Rarely, mages enchant such lids to restore themselves, but normally it isn't resettable and is reserved for low traffic areas such as tombs. Because the nearby floor is fake, it is difficult for victims to catch themselves, imposing a –3 to any rolls to attempt such a thing. Also, due to the nature of this lid, victims suffer an additional 2d4 hp damage from falling debris.

Teeter-Totter

This lid is triggered solely by weight, as the lid (pivoting on a central axle) tips sharply when stepped on, dumping its victims into its pit, and then flips

over—quickly closing the pit. The lid, often of heavy stone, requires a total Strength of 25+ to open from inside the pit (a total Strength of 18 is required to open it from outside). Opening the lid, and keeping it that way while victims escape, are two different things, and a brace or prop of some sort is required. Single attacks on the lid causing 15 or more hp damage briefly lift the lid 6 to 8 inches, allowing ropes or other objects to be thrown through. The lid has a 2-in-6 chance of severing any nonmagical rope or breaking most nonmetal items. If a rope or similar item survives, it is held tightly in place. A teeter-totter lid is generally snugly fit and limits air in the pit to 30 minutes for every 20' depth of a standard 10' × 10' pit.

Illusionary

The ultimate in magical trickery, the area over this pit is actually a *permanent illusion* of the local floor. It is not dispelled by touch or having objects or creatures pass through it, but it is affected by the *dispel magic* spell or similar effects. Generally, there is no chance to disbelieve until potential victims actually see something pass though the "floor." Also, 10% of these pits have *silence* spells permanently in place upon the first 5 feet of the pit's descent, preventing sounds from passing into or out of the pit. However, tapping or other vibrations upon the pit walls might still be felt in the surrounding flooring at the DM's discretion. As this illusion is permanent and similar to the spell *illusionary wall*, consider this effect to be a fourth-level spell cast by at least a mage of 7th-level for purposes of adjudicating immunities (such as those granted by high Intelligence).

Open

Just what it says, the pit has no lid (or once had a lid that has long since been destroyed or removed). About 5% of these pits are actually illusions of open pits covering a solid floor, while a real, hidden pit (roll again on **Table 2** ignoring this result) awaits the unwary on the opposite side.

Standard Pit

Standard Depth: 10'
Random Depth: 2d4 × 10'
The standard pit is the simple, no frills version, with no innate mechanical or magical surprises to speak of. Standard pits can have any type of lid, generally (75%) contain debris of some kind (**Table 3**), and they might also (20%) have a denizen or guardian creature (**Table 4**).

Spike Pit

Standard Depth: 20'
Random Depth: 1d10 × 10'
The spiked pit is every villain's favorite. Not only does it drop the unwary down a hole but also it impales the unfortunate victim on gruesome spikes upon impact. The spiked pit can have any type of lid; it has a 50% chance to contain debris (often skeletal), and it sometimes has denizens (15%). Any creature encountered in a spiked pit should be either small or nonmobile and thus unhampered by the spikes. When someone falls into a spike pit, they are automatically struck by 1d4 spikes. Each spike causes 1d6 hp damage. Roll another 1d6 to see if there is anything special about the spikes.

1–2 **Simple metal spikes.**
3 **Barbed spikes.** Each inflicts an additional 1d4 hp damage when the victim gets off them. A successful Strength check is required to remove oneself from each spike (with a –1 penalty for each spike beyond the first upon which the target is impaled).
4 **Poisoned spikes.** The spikes are coated with poison of some sort, roll 1d4: 1–2, save at –3 or be paralyzed for 1d6 turns; 3, save at +2 or suffer 2d8 hp damage (half damage if successful); 4, save vs. poison or die in 2d4 rounds.
5 **Rusty spikes.** Each point of damage that the victim receives from the fall equates to a 1% chance that he catches a debilitative infection. If an infection is rolled, the victim suffers 1d4 hp damage two turns after suffering the wound as well as a –1 penalty to both Strength and Dexterity. Damage and attribute loss occur each day. Every third day, the character may make a save vs. poison. If successful, the victim recovers and regains one attribute point per day. If failed, the disease progresses as above, the victim allowed another save every third day at a cumulative –1 penalty until cured or an attribute reaches zero and the character dies.
6 **Roll twice,** ignoring sixes.

Flip Pit

Standard Depth: 20' (plus special)
Random Depth: 1d4 × 10'
This pit may have any normal lid, but its major trick is that the floor of this pit is actually a teeter-totter lid that conceals another pit. When a victim falls and hits the floor, roll 1d8:

1–3 **Landed in center.** Floor shakes but remains balanced until victim moves.
4–8 **Landed to one side.** Floor flips victim into secondary pit.

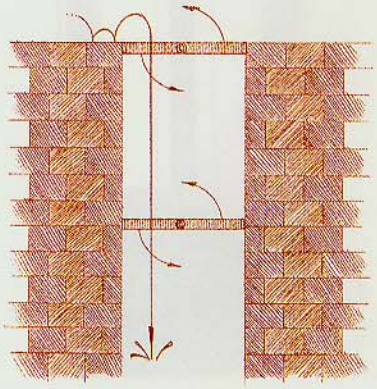


Fig. 4 Flip Pit

If the target lands in the center of the floor, any movement requires a Dexterity check at –2 every round to keep the floor from flipping. Jumping of any sort requires a Dexterity check as above to leap without flipping the lid, and an additional check at –5 if the target lands back on the lid to keep it from flipping.

The secondary pit beneath the flip floor is always a minimum of 20 feet deep. Roll again on **Table 1** with 1d12, and follow the guidelines for the secondary pit as outlined, except the chance of denizens in a secondary pit is always half that of a normal pit.

Lumberjack Pit

Standard Depth: 10'
Random Depth: 1d3 × 10'
The Lumberjack pit is an obvious obstacle, but its many variations make it

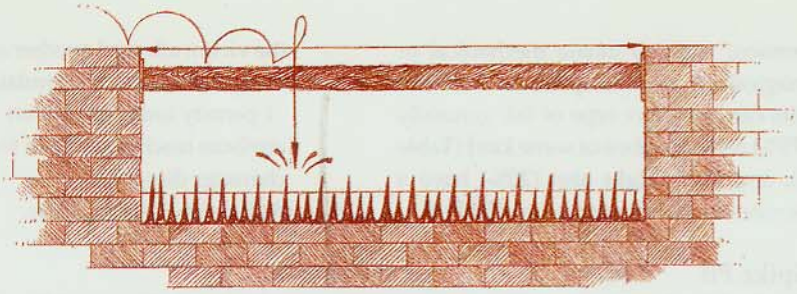
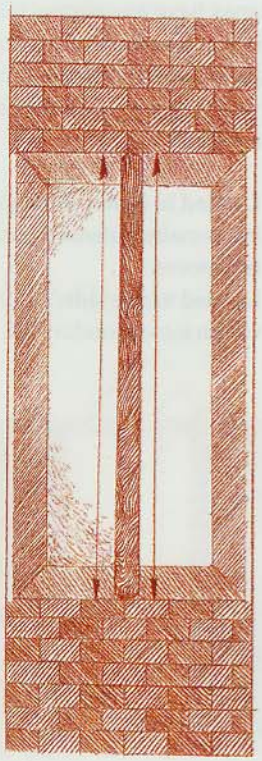


Fig. 5–6 Lumberjack Pit



deadly nonetheless. To determine which type of lumberjack pit is present, roll 1d6:

1–2	Standard Lumberjack
3	Greased
4	Rolling
5	Trapped
6	Fake

Standard

The standard lumberjack pit is invariably 20 feet long or longer, with a single pole that traverses its entire length. Because the pole is rounded, it is difficult to cross. Characters with the tightrope walking nonweapon proficiency cross easily. Those who try to cross without the proficiency must make a Dexterity check at –2 for every 10 feet traveled with the following additional penalties: –2 for every encumbrance level beyond unencumbered, –1 if wearing hard boots, and +1 if wearing crampons. Characters crossing the pole move a number of feet each round equal to their movement rate. The pole can support a finite amount of weight, depending on the materials used in their construction: wooden 200 lbs.; stone 350 lbs.; metal 400 lbs. If this limit is exceeded, the pole saves vs. crushing blow at –1 for every 25 lbs. over its limit each round that the weight limit is exceeded. If the save is failed, the pole breaks, dumping everyone on it into the pit. People within five feet of an edge may make a Dexterity check to catch the edge or leap (at the DM's discretion). The bottom of a lumberjack is either a Standard or Spike Pit (50% chance either) as described above.

Greased

This version exactly duplicates the standard lumberjack pit, except that the pole is greased. All Dexterity checks to cross the pole are made at an additional –4 penalty (tightrope walkers make their checks at –2). The grease is flammable, and, if lit, burns for 2d4+2 rounds, generating a large amount of smoke and inflicting 1d6 hp damage per round to anyone on the pole. Lighting a wooden pole burns it away completely; lighting weakens a stone pole (reducing its weight limit by half) and leaves a metal pole painfully hot for an additional 1d4+2 rounds after the fire is out (damage equals the number of rounds until the pole cools, reduced by one each round), possibly damaging boots or burning bare skin and lighting flammables on touch (like paper or oil). Otherwise, this version is the same as a standard lumberjack.

Rolling

This version also resembles the standard lumberjack; however, the pole is actually a rotating axle. People crossing the pole must make a Dexterity check with a –4 penalty for every three feet traveled (tightrope walkers make their checks at –2). Additionally, roll 1d8. On a 1–3, the axle is greased, incurring an additional –2 penalty. The pole may be wedged into immovability with swords, spikes, or similar items. For every 10 feet of the pole a person traverses, roll a save vs. crushing blow for the pole's material. If it fails, the pole pops or breaks, and the wedge spins suddenly, causing all people currently on the pole to fall.

Trapped

This version always looks like a standard lumberjack pit. To find the specific trap, roll 1d6.

1 **Whoops!** The pole withstands any tests of strength on either end but is lightly cracked or cut in the middle. Any weight on the pole's center five feet in excess of 25 lbs. causes it to break and fall away into the pit. The pole in this version is never metal. About 60% of this type of pit have a spiked pit bottom, while those that don't may have a denizen at the DM's discretion (slimes and molds are perfect).

2 **Kathunka-Thunka.** Small wires (–10% to find traps to discover) run from the bottom of the pole to the base of the pit. Also, there are cleverly hidden circular holes in the walls to either side of the pit (1-in-8 chance to find if specifically looking). Hidden in the walls are a series of mechanically rewound and reloaded heavy crossbows. There are two crossbows per two feet of the pole, each of which fires with a THAC0 of 10. Anyone hit by a bolt must save vs. paralyzation at –6 or fall into the pit. The crossbows may reload 1d10+10 times when found by the party. As heavy crossbows, they require a full round to reload, so there is a 'clear' round afterward in any section where crossbows just fired.

3 **Foot-Kabob.** This pole is always metal. Every foot of the pole is a separate pressure trap which

causes blades and spikes to erupt from the pole into anything touching it. The spikes and blades automatically strike bare skin in contact with the pole. They need to hit AC 8 to pierce boots and leather and must hit AC 3 to pierce metal of any kind. The spikes have a base THAC0 of 15 for this purpose. Upon a successful hit, they inflict 1d4+1 hp damage and may cause detrimental effects similar to caltrops if they strike feet. If they strike a character's hands, the spikes cause –1 to attack and damage rolls with hand-held weapons and a 20% chance to miscast spells with somatic components. If the spikes fail to pierce armor, the target must make a Dexterity check or fall into the pit from the sudden jolt. Those successfully hit must save vs. paralyzation at –1 per hp damage suffered. If failed, the target is impaled on the spike and must make a Strength check to get free. Victims who pull free and those who are simply struck without being impaled must make a Dexterity check to remain on the pole.

4 **Let's Swing!** When an individual steps on the 10' area on either end of this pole, a series of pendulum axes are released from the ceiling, generally one axe per three feet of pole. The axes swing on iron hafts, and the blades sweep one foot above the surface of the pole to catch people attempting to walk or crawl on top of the pole. The axes and iron hafts hit with a THAC0 of 12 and anyone hit while on the pole must make a Dexterity check with a penalty equal to half the damage taken (rounded down). The axes inflict 2d6 hp damage. The pit generally (90%) contains something innately hazardous (like green slime or acid) to prevent people from simply walking across the pit bottom or daring to cling to the underside of the pole to cross.

5 **Blast Furnace!** This pit is always empty, but the walls and floor are always black regardless of the surrounding earth and stone. Investigation reveals the black color to be carbon and ash. The pole is invariably made of metal, and the pit floor appears to have numerous 1"-square holes (4-in-10 chance to notice if specifically looking). When someone puts weight anywhere on the edge of the pit within 1 foot of the pole, the holes in the pit floor erupt with blue-white flame. Anything on the pole or within 5 feet of the pit edge suffers 3d4 hp heat and fire damage. The burst of flame is brief, lasting only a single round. The pole itself is pressure sensitive, and anyone stepping on the pole triggers 3' × 3' blasts of flame on the section of pole they are standing on. The flame continues until no more pressure remains on that section of pole. A person on the pole who is struck by the flame must save vs. paralyzation or fall into the pit. The entire pit floor is pressure sensitive and any weight on it has the same effect (except that damage is 4d6 hp), and flames persist until there is no more weight on the pit floor. (Either the victim escapes or is burned down to weightless cinders.) Flammable items are instantly ignited if taken into the flames (no save). Also, the metal pole remains incredibly hot after any blast of flame and causes 1d4+1 hp damage to any bare skin that touches it in addition to any other flame damage.

6 **Blinkers.** The first person who steps on this pole triggers the trap. The following round, the pole *blinks* (as per the spell) out of existence, dropping any victims currently on it into the pit below. The pole continues to blink in and out of existence once per round for 10 rounds. Roll initiative for the pole and anyone crossing it. If the pole wins, it blinks out before those on it can react. Those who made their initiative that round can move their full movement (remember that movement on the lumberjack pit poles is much slower than normal) before the pole blinks. This does not guarantee that the individual reaches the other side, but it might put him close enough to leap for the opposite edge. After one full turn of blinking, the pole is completely safe for two rounds while the magical effect recharges. Some poles have specific patterns or initiative restrictions. For instance, instead of rolling initiative, some poles blink on a 9 on the first round of activation, then an 8, then 7 and so forth. Others reverse this, or blink for a total of 10 rounds, but with 1d4–1 "safe" rounds between blinking rounds.

Fake

This version appears to be any one of the other lumberjack pits. An actual pole extends from each of the pit edges about 3 feet. The remainder of the "pole" is actually a *permanent illusion*. While it looks fine, the central part has no substance, and people stepping on it fall through without a save if not specifically checking for such things. If somehow the victim is testing the pole before putting his full weight upon it, he is able to avoid the gap or receive a Dexterity check as the DM sees fit.

Crusher Pit

Standard Depth: 20'
Random Depth: 1d4 × 10'

The crusher pit is the ever-popular "smoosh the heroes" pit, with either closing walls or a dropping ceiling. Crusher pits generally have either breakaway or illusory lids, or are simply open. Some also have teeter-totter lids, but no crusher pit ever has edge or central latch lids as they may impede the wall or ceiling crusher systems. Roll 1d8 to determine the kind of crusher pit.

1–3	Standard
4–5	Close & Crush
6–7	Death From Above
8	Flaming Smasher

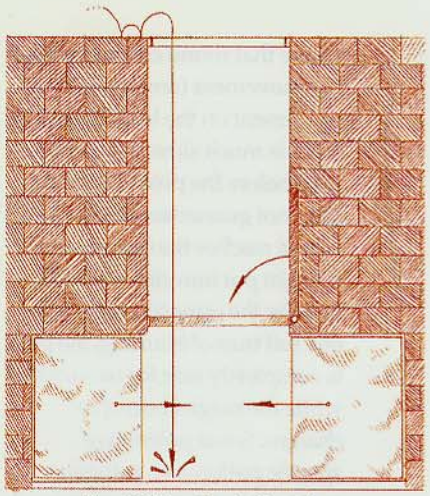


Fig. 7 Standard Crusher

Standard

In the standard version of the crusher pit, the bottom 10 feet are the real trap. After a weight of at least 50 lbs. strikes the floor of the pit, a 4' thick section of the upper 10 feet of the pit swings across the pit, turning the pit bottom into a 10' × 10' × 10' cubic area. This cover can withstand the same damage as any standard pit lid. One round after the lid closes, a horrible grinding sound is heard as the floor and walls begin to vibrate. One round after that, the north and south walls of the pit begin moving toward each other. They are slow and take a full three rounds to completely come together. On the first round, there is no appreciable reduction in space. On the second round, most medium sized creatures are caught tightly between the walls and are unable to escape unless able to change their size, even if the lid is removed and there is an exit. Anything between the blocks on the third round is crushed to jelly. Items of iron or steel set at a corner slow a wall down by one round. However, both walls move independently and are not limited to meeting in the center of the pit. If only one wall is slowed, the walls still meet, but take one additional round to come together.

Close & Crush

This version is triggered by at least 100 lbs. striking the pit floor. Immediately afterward, a 10' × 10' block slides across the upper section of the pit , sealing it off from the opening. The block takes 3 rounds to close the pit off completely and crushes anything between it and opposite wall. Items of iron or steel used to brace the block slow it down for one round but then are destroyed. Once the upper block prevents exit from the pit, the floor begins climbing toward the first block. This takes five rounds, at which point the floor is flush with the upper block, crushing anything between them without a save. Attempting to brace the block slows it down for two rounds. Once flush, both retreat simultaneously, taking 3 rounds to reset.

Death From Above

This pit never has a resetting lid of any sort and is generally found open. About 50% of these pits have spikes in the bottom (as per spiked pit above). One round after at least 50 lbs. has struck the bottom of the pit, another rumbling is heard. (If the pit has spikes, they retract into the floor at this time.) One round after that, a block in the ceiling drops into the pit at tremendous speed. The block is smaller than the pit itself by one inch on all sides. Anything in the pit is crushed without a save. Anything hanging over the edge of the pit which is thicker than one inch is severed by the block (i.e., the limbs or head of someone trying to pull a victim out of the pit), though such characters may receive a Dexterity check or save vs. paralyzation to pull out of the way in time. The block extends into the pit and back into the ceiling, blocking the corridor except for a one inch gap on all sides. The block retreats back into the ceiling anywhere from one round to one day later, taking 10 rounds to actually reset back into the ceiling.

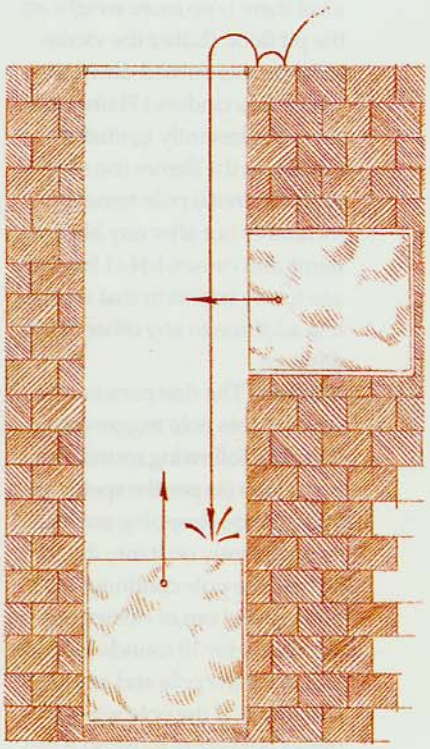


Fig. 8 Close & Crush

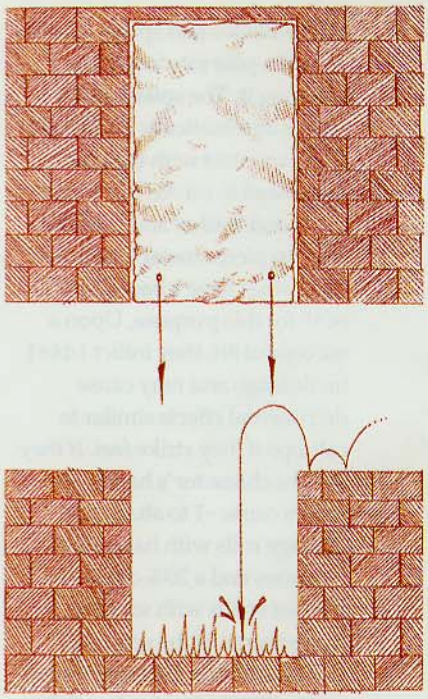


Fig. 9 Death From Above

Flaming Smasher

If this version is rolled, roll again on the Crusher Pit Table, ignoring any 8s. The flaming smasher exactly duplicates one of the other crusher pit types. However, one of the pit surfaces has tiny holes, which upon the round of activation (when weight hits the pit floor) release streams of Greek fire into the pit. One of the blocks has a steel surface whose edges throw sparks as it grinds along the abutting stone walls, thus setting the Greek fire alight on the round when the blocks begin moving. The resultant inferno causes 3d6 hp damage to anything in the pit. The flames continue for two more rounds, causing 2d6 hp damage on the second round and 1d6 on the last round. This generally reduces the victim to ash and keeps the pit free from carrion which might attract unwanted vermin and monsters. The walls near the pit are blackened from the fires, warning adventurers that something isn't right.

Paranoia Pit

Standard Depth: 10' (at least 20' long)
Random Depth: 1d2 ×10'

This type of pit always has an open top without a lid, no side ledges, and extremely smooth walls beside it (–70% to climb walls chance). However, the pit bottom always looks safe to cross. Roll 1d6 to determine type.

1 Standard
2 Who's There?
3 Gimme Da Dirt!
4 My Name is Mud
5 Just Plain Mean
6 The Better Mousetrap

Standard

The bottom of this pit is covered in spikes, but there is enough space for safe walking. The first 5' section of the pit floor on either side is safe. The rest of the pit floor is a series of pressure plate traps set between the spikes. Each 5' × 5' area walked on fires 1d4+1 spikes upward into victims. The spikes are launched mechanically with a base THAC0 of 13, but are considered to be making a rear attack (+2 to hit) unless victims are carefully watching the floor as they walk. Each spike that does hit inflicts 1d6 hp damage and there is a chance (25% each) that the spike is barbed or poison-coated. Launched spikes are replaced almost immediately from an effectively limitless supply. Spikes that miss any target disappear upon striking the ceiling, returned magically to the pit's reserves. Continuous pressure on a single plate causes spikes to fire every round. Every 5' × 5' floor plate of the pit is a trap and must be disarmed separately (at –30%), or may be destroyed by inflicting 50 hp damage from blunt weapons or stoneworking tools.

Who's There?

This pit has a flat bottom, and the sides are covered in reflective steel, silver, or mirrors. A minor (3rd-level) illusion has been cast on each 5' × 3' mirror plate. When characters crosses the pit, they swear they see something reflected in the mirrors out of the corner of their eyes. The DM should make rolls to unnerve the players, but there is no real effect. This is generally the extent of the pit's power, to simply unnerve and worry intruders. However, 35% of these pits are much deadlier. Roll 1d6 to see how deadly.

1 One of the mirrors is a *mirror of opposition* (see *DMG*).
2 The mirrors are portals for a pack of 1d4 fetch (see *DRAGONLANCE® MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM®*).
3 One of the mirrors is a *mirror of simple order* (see *ENCYCLOPEDIA MAGICA™* book, page 734).
4 One is a *mirror of life trapping* (see *DMG*).
5 One is a *mirror of age*. Anyone looking into the mirror sees themselves 20 years older. If they look for a full round, they must make a save vs. polymorph or suddenly age 1d10+10 years. If they continue to look at the mirror, they must save every round to avoid the effect again.
6 Anywhere from 1d4 of the mirrors show a reflection of some kind of monster standing behind the viewer (5th-level illusion). If the target turns to look, they are confronted by a *shadow monster* (as per the spell) of the depicted creature (cast at the 15th level of experience). Other individuals looking on see the monster "step out" of the mirror behind the target. The mirror the monster "steps out of" isn't the dangerous one; the mirror the victim looked into initially is the true source of the effect. If that first mirror is destroyed, it generates no further shadow monsters. The *shadow monster* focuses all attacks on the initial viewer, attacking other targets only if the initial target dies or others interpose themselves between it and its victim. The most commonly monsters used are 1—orc; 2—constrictor snake; 3—carnivorous ape; 4—dire wolf; 5—tiger; 6—umber hulk; 7—crocodile; 8—bugbear; 9—wyvern; 10—Rather than generating a *shadow monster*, this mirror casts *phantasmal killer* on the target.

Gimme Da Dirt!

The bottom of this pit is filled with packed dirt (about five feet deep). Guarding the bottom of the pit are 1d8+1 earth weirds (*MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Annual* 1). The weirds wait until at least one intruder is halfway across the pit floor, then they attack, two to a target, starting with the individual closest to the center and moving outward from there. Like water weirds, they regenerate their forms quickly after being "killed" and continue the assault.

My Name is Mud

The bottom of this pit is filled with five feet of mud. The mud slows characters to ⅓ their movement rate and imposes a –2 penalty to all attack and damage rolls. Any attack by a character that *misses* by 5 or more leaves him unbalanced and requires a Dexterity check. Failure indicates the individual has slipped in the mud and automatically loses initiative during the next combat round. There is always something in the mud protecting the pit. Roll 1d4: 1—4d4 mudmen; 2—1d6+4 skeletons; 3—1d4+4 zombies; 4—a brown pudding.

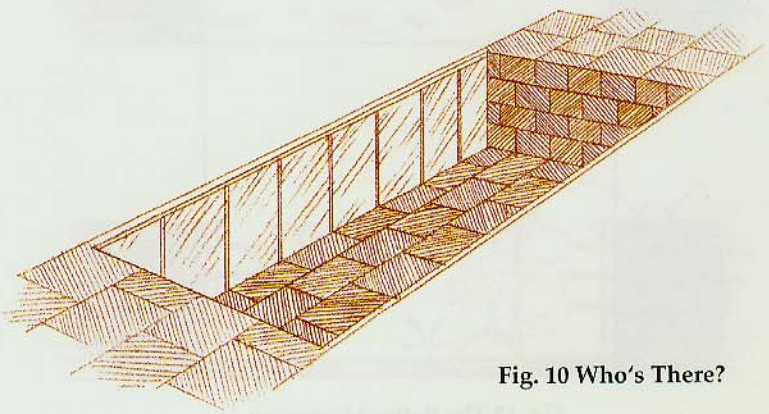


Fig. 10 Who's There?

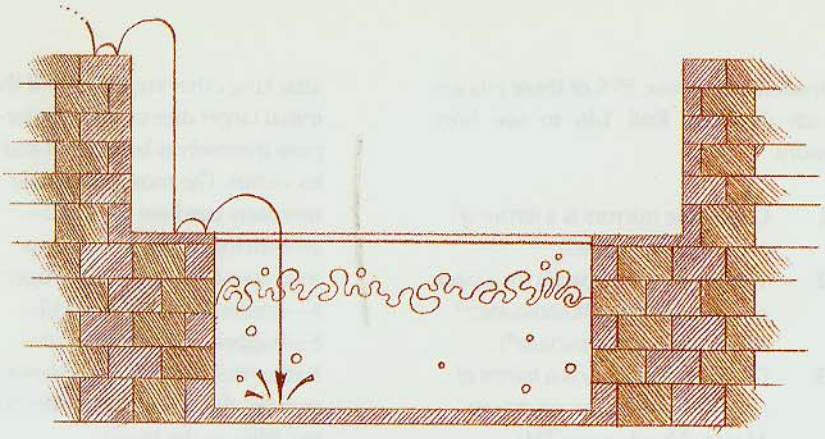


Fig. 11 Just Plain Mean

Just Plain Mean

This pit is never less than 40 feet long, and always at least 15 feet deep. The first five feet of the pit floor on either end is safe. The rest of the floor is actually a strong illusion (6th-level). Below the illusory floor is a 20' deep pit, the bottom 10 feet of which is filled with deadly acid. The floor illusion includes an olfactory component which cancels out any odor generated by the acid below it. The acid has no effect on glass or stone objects. Falling into the acid causes only 1d8 hp falling damage due to its cushioning effect. However, it immediately begins to burn and eat away at both the victim and his items. Creatures and items with hit points suffer 4d4 hp damage per round. Items need to make a save vs. acid at –2 every round or be destroyed. Creatures who escape from the pit suffer 3d4 hp damage the round they get out and 1 die less damage each round thereafter until the acid neutralizes, unless washed off earlier with water or vinegar. Items likewise still need to save for 3 rounds after exiting the pit (but with no penalties) unless washed.

The Better Mousetrap

Like all other Paranoia Pits, this one looks relatively safe to cross. Once 300 lbs. or more are on the floor of the pit, a rumbling begins. That round the ceiling block above the pit (which overlaps its edges by a foot) slams down from above, sealing off the pit completely. Victims within a foot of the pit's edge or climbing out must make a Dexterity check to dodge; otherwise, they suffer at least 4d4 hp damage and might suffer a few crushed limbs (DM's discretion). Once closed, 90% of these pits simply remain closed, effectively blocking the corridor as well. There is enough air in the pit for one man sized creature for 24 hours. If there are multiple victims, divide this time by how many are trapped to find out how long the air lasts. The block weighs several tons and requires magic to move or bypass. However, if all weight is removed from the pit floor for at least 10 rounds, the pit resets, withdrawing the block into the ceiling. About 10% of these pits decide to add insult to injury. Roll 1d4 to determine the method.

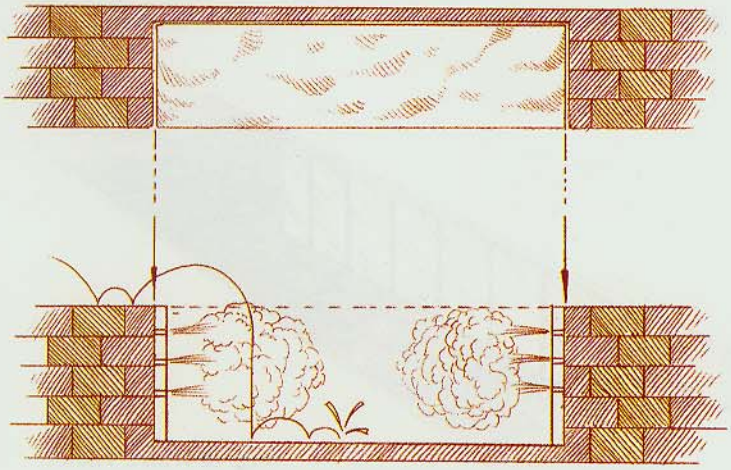


Fig. 12 The Better Mousetrap

1. **Fumes.** Poison gas is released through minute cracks in the walls. A save vs. poison must be made each round of inhalation. Once a save is failed, the victim suffers one point of damage per round until dead or cured.
2. **Bugs.** A swarm of 1,000 poisonous, biting insects is released through tiny holes from chambers in the walls where they are kept in magical stasis until the trap is triggered. The insects emerge at a rate of 100 per round for ten rounds and duplicate the effects of a *creeping doom* spell. Remember that fire attacks against the insects reduce the amount of breathable air (a good estimate is reduce the time remaining with breathable air by 10 minutes per point of fire damage).
3. **Flood.** Water from hidden tanks behind the walls begins to fill the chamber, taking 10 rounds. Once filled, victims without magic or gills begin to drown as per the drowning rules in the *DMG*.
4. **Shadows.** 1d4+4 shadows emerge to attack the trapped individuals.

Illusion Pit

Standard Depth: Variable
Random Depth: 2d8 × 10'

This series of pits is magical and complex, if only because they use large amounts of illusion magic. All illusions are cast at least at the 15th-level of ability, higher if the spell level demands it. Roll 1d10 to choose an illusion pit.

1–2	HAHAHA!
3–4	It's a Pit!!
5–6	Displacer Pit
7–8	Where?
9–10	BZZZZAP!!

HAHAHA!

This "pit" is a powerful illusion (7th-level), and is triggered by an individual stepping on the "lid" of the pit. The unfortunate victim suffers effects which duplicate a real pit and reacts accordingly (screaming during the "fall," etc.) and believes their comrades who are looking at them are doing so from the top of a 50' deep pit. Anyone within 15

feet of the pit is affected by a simultaneous and linked illusion that shows their companion falling down a pit, and when they look down at him it appears that he is in a 50' deep pit. Individuals standing outside the area of affect see people in the area acting like fools, "victims" laying on the floor, while "rescuers" dangle rope a few feet above their heads. Likewise, people who leave the area after being affected are also released from the illusion. The real trick happens afterward. A real pit is underneath the illusionary pit, and is triggered by weight leaving the "lid" and then having weight placed on again, or by any attempts to *dispel magic*. The real pit is corridor wide, 20 feet long and 30 feet deep. Roll for debris and denizens. About 30% also have spikes.

It's a Pit!

This powerful illusion (8th-level) is enhanced by physical construction. The area in question has slightly discolored flooring and a small open space below it so that it sounds hollow if tapped. The actual illusion creates a wide variety of trips, triggers, and pressure plates that are automatically detectable by thieves and *find traps* spells. The purpose is simply to keep thieves and other trap disablers busy. Nothing they do seems to trigger the pit, and as they finish with one trigger, they notice another. About 50% of these pits have a secondary magic, like an *alarm* spell that alerts dungeon denizens, or a *monster summoning* spell (generally of types I, II, and III) that summons monsters behind or amid the party, causing automatic surprise. The "pit" doesn't actually exist, and can support as much weight as the rest of the floor.

Displacer Pit

This pit appears to be any other standard pit (roll again on the **Table 1**, ignoring any results of illusion pits). A special illusion (3rd-level) fills the pit with a permanent displacement effect. All creatures and objects within the pit appear to be 2 to 4 feet away from their actual position, both to other victims as well as to outside observers. This makes it extremely difficult to catch ropes or target certain useful spells. Generally, the first attempt to catch, target, or grab someone or something in the pit is an automatic miss, and all subsequent attempts are at –4. Even simple tasks like grabbing a stationary rope requires an attack roll. By the time victims escape, guards or monsters may have shown up to find out what all the cursing and swearing is about.

Where?

Cousin to the displacer pit, this pit contains a permanent *invisibility* field (cast at 4th-level) that affects anything within the pit. Even things that are only partially in the pit are affected, becoming invisible from the lip down. Thus, the victim is invisible, and a rope lowered to him is also invisible, except above the pit lid. About 25% of these pits have a permanent *silence* effect, so that anyone looking in the pit sees and hears absolutely nothing except an empty pit.

BZZZZAP!

This trap begins when the victims walking over the pit are struck by green beams of light and apparently disintegrated. This is all a powerful *programmed illusion* (cast at 7th-level). The pit has either a central latch or teeter-totter lid for quick reset that is hidden by the illusion. "Disintegrated" victims have actually fallen into the pit. There is always a permanent *silence* effect inside the pit to prevent the "vaporized" individual from calling for help.

Gravity Pit

Standard Depth: 20'
Random Depth: 1d6 × 10'

An amusing high magic pit design is the reverse gravity pit, where victims fall *up* into a pit in the ceiling. While unexpected, this is a rather vanilla example of the fun one can have with reverse and multiple gravity pits. Most gravity pits can have the full range of lid types. Roll 1d10 to determine the kind of gravity pit.

1–2	Gravity Sucks
3–4	Double Whammy
5–6	Watch Out!
7–8	That'll Leave a Mark!
9–10	There Seems to be a Blockage

Gravity Sucks

When a victim walks under this pit, a *reverse gravity* spell is triggered, causing the victim to "fall" to the ceiling. Once triggered, the *reverse gravity* is permanent. This pit tends to catch more characters than a standard pit for two reasons: the floor is flat, so inquisitive characters have an easier time moving forward to look up at people already in the trap; and characters expect to fall down, not up—they have fewer qualms about walking under a raised ceiling than they would have about walking over a pit.

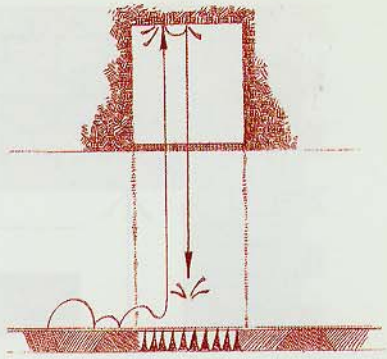


Fig. 13 Gravity Pit

Double Whammy

This pit functions exactly as "gravity sucks" above, but as soon as the victim hits the pit's ceiling, the *reverse gravity* effect abates, and the target finds himself falling back to the corridor floor, for more damage. Roughly 20% of these pits have an additional mechanical effect. When at least 50 lbs. hits the ceiling, steel spikes emerge from the corridor floor, and impale the poor victim upon his return trip, as per the spike pit (see above).

Watch Out!

This version starts out like a standard *reverse gravity* pit. However, at the pit's bottom, one of its walls is missing, instead leading down a "corridor" of equal dimensions to the main pit. When the target hits the bottom of the main pit, the initial *reverse gravity* effect ends, but the bottom of the pit suffers from a pull of gravity that makes the victim fall into the side pit. The side pit may have a side pit of its own. Generally there are 1d10 pits in the series. The *reverse gravity* of the main pit does not affect the corridor below it until its current victims reach the final pit in the series. The last pit may be a simple dead-end that the victim can climb out of, an opening to an otherwise inaccessible section of the dungeon, or the lair of a beast capable of *levitation*, allowing it to ignore the effects of the *reverse gravity* fields leading to its den.

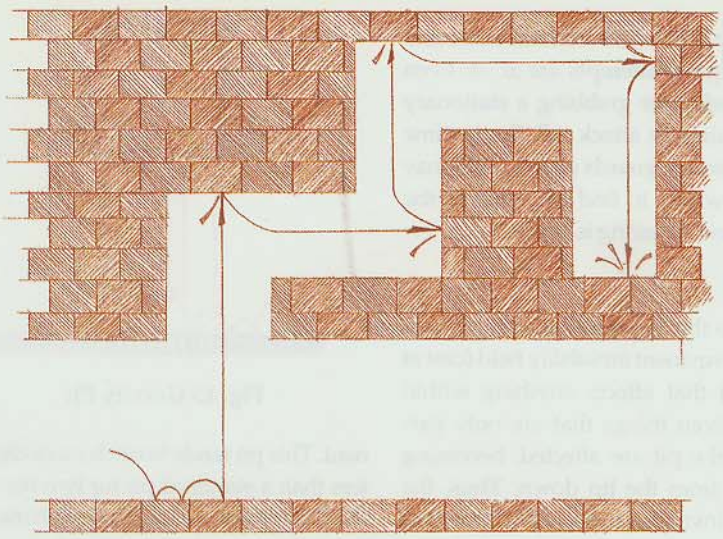


Fig. 14 Watch Out!

There Seems to be a Blockage

This starts as a standard *reverse gravity* pit. Three rounds after a target has fallen into the ceiling pit, the gravity field abates. However, the bottom 10' of the pit is actually a 10' × 10' × 10' stone block. When the *reverse gravity* fades, the victim falls back to the corridor and the block follows closely behind. Victims in the pit, as well as anyone directly below the pit, risk death. To move out of the way they must make two Dexterity checks. If both succeed, the block has been avoided, though individuals falling out of the ceiling pit still take normal damage. Those who make only one check are caught by the block near its edge. Victims suffer 6d6 hp damage (plus falling damage) and are pinned. At least 45 Strength points are required to shift the block enough to drag a pinned character to safety. Anyone failing both checks is squarely hit and crushed to death.

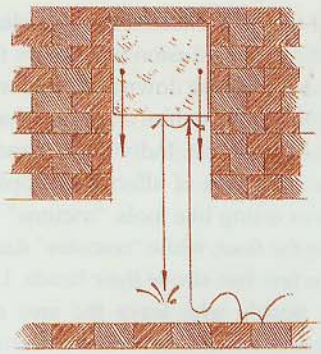


Fig. 15 There Seems to be a Blockage

Alec J. Baclawski recommends searching for traps first. Always.

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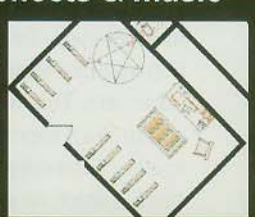

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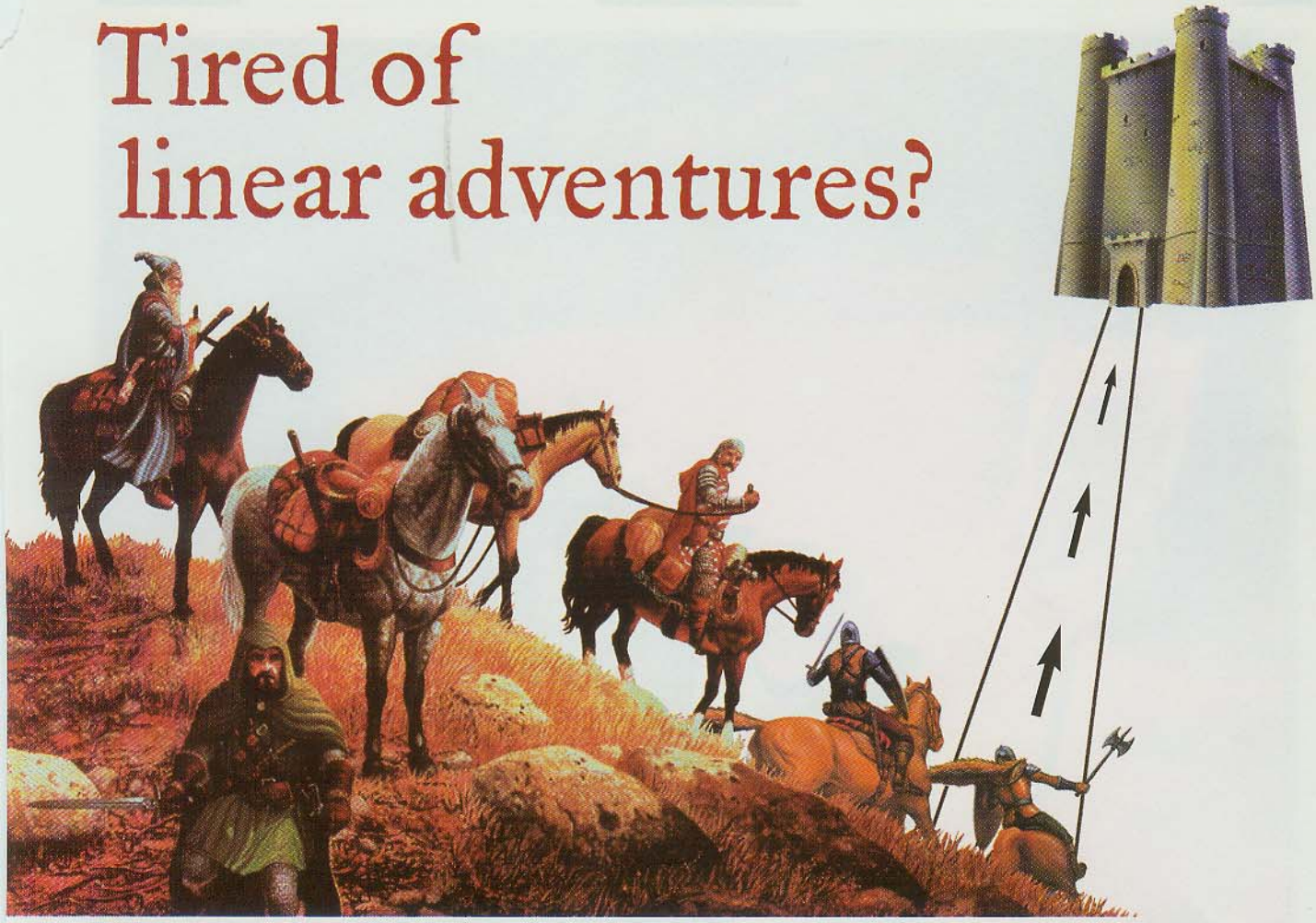

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ARTHUR'S FINAL MORN

J. Robert King

illustrated by
Jeff Miracola

Battle of Camlaun, anno Domini 539

So all day long the battle roll'd
Among the mountains by the winter sea,
Until King Arthur's table, man by man,
Had fallen in Lyonesse about their lord.

—Alfred, Lord Tennyson

On the burning banks of the Somerset Cam, Arthur and his noble retainers made a last stand. Briton traitors and Saxon invaders wore them down. Before him, Cei and Bedwyr slew helmed barbarians like reapers wading into harvest wheat. Beside him, Trystan and Gwalchmei threshed the screaming hordes, caught red between burning fields and the dying winter sun. Behind him, the ragged remains of his army fought wearily to regain the river.

In black bulwarks all around, the dead lay, Briton and Saxon arm in arm. Among them mounded the five-score horses Arthur's cavalry had ridden into battle, horses poisoned that morn by treacherous Medraut.

"Ecce Homo!" cried Arthur, his sword glinting fire-bright as it jabbed over toiling heads.

There, ahead of him, across a forest of shouting steel, sat Medraut, astride one of Arthur's own horses.

Red beard charged with blood, Arthur shouted, "To him!"

He drove his spatha blade beneath a Saxon's jaw and hurled him down, a drawbridge into the midst of the host. Puttees painted by clutching hands, he strode upon the dying man and took the battle to the traitors.

Cei prized his spatha from a dead man's eye and saw his lord advance. "The men retreat, Arthur. We will be cut off!" Despite these words, he followed his lord. "If you fall, all Britons fall."

"All Britons shall fall today," Arthur answered, "but so shall Medraut."

Bedwyr pushed alongside Cei, and behind came Trystan and Gwalchmei. A handful of other true-hearted Britons accompanied them into the swallowing army. The rest, cut off from their lord, withdrew in dread and dismay. Some Saxon axes hewed the backs of fleeing Britons, and the ice-churning Cam ran red with blood. The mass of traitors and Saxons turned inward upon Arthur, for they knew that to capture him was to capture the land.

Arthur sought not victory but revenge. He cleaved through the rebel ranks and drove arrow-straight for the mounted traitor. "Nephew!" he called. "Get of my sorcerous stepsister! Son of my regret! Do me battle!"

"Arthur!" cried Medraut, black hair and black beard cropped close to his emerald-eyed face. "This is your last day among the living!" He drove his great steed forward atop Saxon backs to reach his hated foe.

"And this is your last hour!" Arthur replied.

The warriors between the two melted away like men of glass in a furnace, so great was the enmity between the men. Medraut charged his steed straight for Arthur and lifted his barbarous great sword high. His horse's hooves slew Saxons

in their scores, for he had no love for the allies of his treachery.

The King of Britons set his feet for the charge, lofted his own blade, and growled through crimson teeth, "Let this be your Potter's Field, Judas."

Medraut's great sword descended in fury, its steel charged with the shouldering might of the horse. Unbloodied until then, it crashed hard through shoulder guard, ring mail, leather tunic, woolen tunic, flaxen camisia, skin, muscle, bone, and all and clove a great, bloody trough in the shoulder of the king.

Arthur roared in mortal agony and crumpled away. The sword of Medraut grated upon bone as it scraped free of the grisly joint. His Saxon allies surged in upon the fallen form. An ax swung neigh to sever the king's head, but the spatha of Cei intervened. Steel flashed and bore the freckled barbarian back upon his heels, and back again into blood-speckled death. Bedwyr came hard after and engaged Medraut's blade. A horse of a man, black-bearded Bedwyr drove the charger back with sword-work furious. Trystan was next into the fray, who fought like ten men to drive off the host. Gwalchmei made his spatha an aspergillum and baptized the pagans in their own blood. The men-at-arms that brought up the rear carved out among them a tiny island where the kingdom yet lived.

Arthur lay in the midst, dying.

Astride his prancing charger, Medraut called out to them all, "Surrender now, or die. Your king is dead. Your land is dead. The dream of Rome is finished. The day of your foes has dawned." Even as he spoke these words, his horse's hoof came down upon a fallen Saxon's chest and punched through as into a rotten log. The horse foundered, its foot trapped in a cage of ribs. Its ankle snapped, and the steed dropped shrieking down.

Medraut was flung free. He plunged across the field of dead until he came to Arthur's spatha. It jutted up from his fallen form in the stead of his standard. The blade fetched Medraut down and to ground. He ended there, with Arthur's spatha made a bloody pennant above his pierced back.

"I am not yet dead," Arthur said into the rebel's tear-streaming face. "But you are."

Light fled Medraut's eyes as the sun fled the world. Briton and Saxon both knew dismay at the carnage. But swords did not cease in the air, only diving faster like vultures upon carrion. Cei fell first of the noble retainers, and Bedwyr in the breath thereafter. Trystan lasted only moments more, and fell beneath bleeding Gwalchmei. And for a moment, the sea of Saxons closed over the dying Arthur.

Then the Cam itself erupted. Waters coursing from the center of the land rose in defiance and mourning. A great gray wall broke outward upon the traitor and Saxon throngs. The heads of the waves rushed across them, falcon-swift, as the waves across wicked Pharaoh of old, and soon the savage host bobbed like corks in a flooded cellar.

In the midst of that wrathful tide came a wizened figure, strange beyond thought. His battered boots danced outward on the raging waves, his robes swirled in gray mockery of his windblown hair, and the red light that had quit the sky with the sun blazed in his awful eyes. He descended out of the outraged gale and lighted upon a swath of dry earth beside bleeding Arthur. The old man's withered face was querulous and sad beneath his hood, the which he drew back from fleecy brows.

"You are not dead yet, Arthur. Nor Britain."

A shuddering sigh shook Arthur, couched in mortal blood, and he said simply, "Myrddin."

Myrddin Magus

Now Merlin was a wise and subtle man with strange and secret powers of prophecy and those deceptions of the ordinary and the obvious which are called magic. Merlin knew the winding channels of the human mind, and also he was aware that a simple open man is most receptive when he is mystified, and Merlin delighted in mystery.

—John Steinbeck

Arthur knew what was to come, but was filled with the terrors of mortal flesh. And so he said, "You remember the future, Myrddin. Will I yet live?"

Myrddin's ancient face darkened, and he looked out to the receding flood. "Let us be away from here, or neither of us will see the morn."

The old wizard spied then, struggling among the flood ravaged host, a small horse of the Pictish sort. It dragged a dead Saxon rider, snagged among its sodden packs. Myrddin summoned the brute, two fingers set to whistle between taut lips. The pony tossed its dappled mane and made for him as if to a master of years. The wizard drew up the horse and did off its fouled gear with his knife. He hoisted the ruined lord of Britons aback the shaggy beast and strode toward the spilling banks, past the straggling Saxons.

Three men rose from the beleaguered host and pursued them, for they thought to bring axes down upon the king. Myrddin did not turn to engage them but only began a slow, haunting song. Upon a certain turn in the melody, all three fell of a sudden, their blades greeting their brows and spilling their brains within the tide of the Cam. No other Saxon dared approach the ancient filid, the dying king, or the Pictish pony, lest the song likewise turn their axes traitor. Nor did any Briton join them, the massacre complete before the death of the day.

Onward walked the singing wizard, through the sluicing fields and waist deep in the ice-clogged Cam. He led horse and rider up the far side and into the rising copses of the western Somerset.

Apollo now has quit the skies
To tryst with darksome Luna, who
Beneath the realm of Hades lies.
And from the jealous Pluto flies
The sun, to battle midnight through
And rise.

Arthur heard this dirge and knew it was sung for him, and so he asked again, "Myrddin, remember my fate for me. Will I live to see the morn?"

The wizard's shoulders bowed, but his pace did not slacken. "We go where you will be safe, where the Saxons shall not come until you are gone."

Below, the trembling Saxons rose from the frigid flood and watched their foe march steadily away into the Glastonbury Hills. The battle was done, the Britons were decimated, but the man who was the land yet lived. Not until they stood atop his mounded tomb could they claim to rule the land.

Upon that lowly pony, the dying King of Britons slipped slowly away. He gathered breath to ask, "Where are we going? Where are you taking me?"

Myrddin's song paused. "To the Isle of Glastonbury."

The Isle of Avalon

Even the renowned King Arthur himself was wounded deadly and was borne thence unto the island of Avalon....

—Geoffrey of Monmouth

The late moon painted Glastonbury Isle in ice. Morning cowered below the east, and the savage winds of winter sang down from the dead sky. No firelight shone from the black tor. All Arthur's men had gone with him to Camlaun, and all now lay in caskets of ice upon the banks of the Cam.

The abbey below Glastonbury Tor sported lantern gleam and sent gold among the frozen reeds of the swamps around, but Arthur would be no more welcome to the abbey's golden light than he had been to its golden coin. By threat and bluff would Myrddin win past the monks to gain the isle. By threat and bluff would he convince them to delay the following host, for from dark wood and black brier, the Saxons closed.

Myrddin staggered. His robes were starched in ice. His brows and beard were masked in frost. The pony trembled also, and Arthur groaned as he rode. Myrddin's staying song had become a weary chant between chattering teeth. It's chuffing tones had slain five more pursuers since they quit the Cam.

"Where are we?" Arthur asked again.

Myrddin panted. "The causeway to Glastonbury Isle. We are just before Ponters Ball."

"Call Cei and Bedwyr. I fear I am dying."

"I have called them," Myrddin replied in sad humor. "They will come when they can."

The pony champed into the great black shadow of Ponters Ball. The earthwork palisade cut across the causeway from swamp to swamp. It opened in a gate that was manned by three monks with long staves and torches.

"Halt, beggar," called one.

Myrddin nudged the pony forward up the bank and toward the gate. "I am no beggar, but the Witch Myrddin. I bear with me the wounded King of Britons."

"What news from Camlaun?"

"Rout and ruin," Myrddin said. "Let us pass."

"Rout and ruin? Wounded King of Britons? On what authority do you beg passage, Witch?"

"On authority of your life," Myrddin replied.

A snap of his fingers turned the three staves hot in the hands of the monks. They loosed them and wood steamed upon hoary grass. The monks waved scorched fingers in the frigid air but let pass the old wizard, the weary pony, and the dying king.

"And close the gates behind. The Saxons are coming. They will likely slay you for harboring this one," Myrddin said simply. "Don't let that stop you. The pagans will likely slay you anyway, cretins."

The monks made sounds of woe and worked hurried adjustments to the gate. Each torch became a bonfire, and their summoning horns called down slumbering comrades from their beds.

Myrddin paid them no heed. He guided the beast not toward the abbey, for Arthur's enemies were as thick there as upon the banks of the Cam. Myrddin led the pony up the switch-back path to the tor, where lay the cold hearths of Arthur's summer camp. Dark the hovels were beneath the wheeling night and frost-tattered their thatch. The bowers of firewood stood empty. The wells were rimmed in ice.

Myrddin drew the pony up within a stall, tore a vermin-nibbled bag of grain from its nail, and broke the ice atop the water trough. He dragged the slumbering king from the horse's back and bore him into his hovel. Wind picked at the closed shutters, and cobwebs filled the black hearth. Myrddin laid the dying king abed, drew covers over him, and smashed a chair upon the hearth. He conveyed the shards of wood within and woke a fire. The clamor woke also the king.

"Is the sun up, Myrddin?" asked Arthur, "I must prepare to meet the Saxons today upon the Cam."

The fire kindled beyond the old wizard glowed as of a vibrant dawn, and Myrddin was etched upon the darkness. He said sadly, "The sun is not up, Arthur, and you have met the Saxons. They have defeated you."

Arthur was startled at this news. The cold covers upon him trembled. "I am defeated? What of Cei and Bedwyr? How did they fare this day?"

Myrddin sought out the unbroken twin of the chair that now burned upon the hearth. He dragged it before the blaze, sat, and picked ice from his robes. "Cei is lost. Bedwyr as well."

"And Trystan and Gwalchmei?" asked the king.

"Yes."

Arthur eased himself down into the cold bed. "And the army?"

"Gone." Myrddin's hands wished for a book before settling like struck tents in his lap. "Medraut poisoned our horses. His traitors—your own folk—swept the field. You and I alone survive, and the Saxons have harried us here, to Glastonbury Tor. They are kept back only by the monks on Ponters Ball." Even then came the first sound of soldier shouts on the causeway below, and the fitful flare of fires kindled in threat to the palisades.

"Then my kingdom is lost," Arthur spoke. "Then all is lost."

"Not all. Gwenhwyvaer survives in Cadbury. Word will reach her soon, and she will flee here."

Arthur was heartened. "It will be well to be together again."

Myrddin leaned to the bedside and took hold of the king's healthy arm. "You will not last long enough to see her. Medraut's sword was poisoned. He has slain cavalry, king, and country with his poisons. You will not last the night."

A great tremor moved the king, so that Myrddin's chair leg chattered on the frozen floor. "I do not want to die in darkness. Help me see the morn."

Webs of gold gleamed in the mage's brows. "The Saxons will breach the gate before dawn. It would be easier for you to sleep now."

A laugh came from the king. "I have never taken the easier path. It will take them a while to sack the abbey before they rise to the tor. In that time, speak to me. Keep me awake until morn. You remember the future, Myrddin. Tell me what will happen? Will the kingdom be swept away?"

The wizard considered. The fire had warmed the rafters, and Myrddin breathed the welcoming heat. Where Arthur lay, all was yet cold as the grave. The bard said, "It will be swept away. But slowly. It will not fall like the east. Your people will not be destroyed utterly, but enslaved, subjugated. The conquerors will be much changed by the march of years, pillagers no longer, but lords in their own right. And many Britons will flee to Gaul, to a place that will be called Brittany after them, and from thence and Normandy shall return in five centuries to reclaim the land. The bonfire you have lit will dwindle and die, yes, but ever the coals will smolder, and one day rise to new flame."

Arthur's face had turned ashen. "And that is all I have done, lit a single candle in the vast cold dark?"

"A single candle is invaluable in cold and dark," returned Myrddin. "And your name will fly forever through time, and bring upon its pinions honor and peace."

"They will remember me? They will remember Badon and Camlaun? They will remember Cei and Bedwyr, Trystan and Gwalchmei, Gwenhwyvaer and you, Myrddin?"

A sad smile creased the wizard's face. "History remembers only what it can use. They will remember Arthur, yes, but Cei will become Kay, and Bedwyr will be Bedevere; Trystan is Tristam; Gwalchmei is Gawain; Gwenhwyvaer, Guinevere; Medraut, Modred; and I—this outrageous most of all—I am Merlin, for my true name, in the tongue of the Gauls, means dung."

Arthur could not help but laugh at that. "Ah, so we are remembered, but as vulgarities?"

"Worse," said Myrddin, wiping away a laughing tear. "All vulgarity will vanish from us, and the truth of our struggles with it. We will never be dirty, cold, desperate, fearful. We will ever be garbed in white, meeting about a great round table, discussing virtue. Your leather and ring mail will become samite and 'full-plate' mail; your noble retainers will become creatures called 'knights'; you will cease to be King of Britons and become King of Britain; you will not only unify all these isles but also march upon and conquer Rome; your rule will become the eternal model of 'feudal' perfection; your earthwork encampment at Cadbury will become 'Camelot'—a New Jerusalem; and, though you will be buried with Gwenhwyvaer beside the abbey below—and made a dead saint where you were not welcome as a living rogue—this beswamped mound will become 'Avalon' of the faery folk, a mystical isle that appears and disappears from the mists and from which you will return one day to rule—the once and future king."

Arthur was grieved by all of the uses to which his name would be put. He wished at last he would never be named again. But most of all, he grieved the news that Gwenhwyvaer, too, would die when she reached the isle. "I should not have asked, old friend. Knowing what is to come can bring a mortal man only grief."

Arthur peered through the splintered shutter. The eastern sky grew wanly light with the approaching sun. But its glow was nothing to the burning palisades below and the black host of Saxony beyond.

"I wish to die now."

The Once and Future King

At Glastonbury on the queer
They made Artourez toumbe there,
And wrote with latyn verse thus
Hic jacet Arthurus, rex quandam, rex futurus.

—Red Book of Bath

Myrddin also was grieved and wished of a sudden that Arthur would live to see one final morn. "The future is not so terrible a place, Arthur. It is better—much better—for your having lived here and now."

Unmoving upon the poor pallet, the king spoke, hope departed, "You speak of five centuries in the future. How long, O backward-living bard, do you live?"

"Long, Arthur. I live long," said Myrddin, weary to each tissue, "until the magic I wield is given into the hands of every man and woman and child, until the peace you have won in this one kingdom has spread through most of the world, until wealth like that of which we dream is earned by each one in hard work. And all the while, I grow younger. At last, an infant divested of all magic and reason and memory, I am subsumed into my mother, as my power is subsumed into all folk everywhere."

"A splendid time to live," said the dying king. The rattle had already begun in his breast, but yet his heart pounded in his hopeful words. "Tell me of it."

From the abbey below rose up a great wailing cry. The old bard saw through the cracked door that the library burned. "There are libraries everywhere, for one," he said. Sadness haunted his eyes in distant flame. "And schools. And shops. Most folk will know the magic of words on a page. They will travel time and place through this magic. They will learn from the long-dead—"

The screaming of the abbey's ponies broke the account. The mounts had been a gift from Arthur himself, and now they were trapped in the burning stables.

"The people of that time will move about in steel chariots filled with savory foods and music from bards in distant places and times. Some, as large as castles and as fleet as the sun, take to the skies to rival Apollo. Others dive beneath the waves, metal monsters more fearsome than the Geat-eating Leviathan of legend.

"Most folk will live in palaces, and each person, even the children, will own more clothes than you, Great King. They will speak to each other at vast distances, and see visions from afar. From a stone as small as my thumb, they will awaken new suns on the earth. In that time, my magic is a trifling thing, a matter of lapine fur and high silk hats. In that time, I am a young man, perhaps only an old boy. This beautiful gray beard of mine is but golden down."

Arthur spoke wonderingly, "In that time, the folk will have all the fruits of peace and prosperity and magic. The common man is a king. The common woman is a queen. What use a Briton lord or a Celtic bard in times like those?"

Shouts came from below, and growls of anger. The Saxons had not found their quarry. They would soon mount the road. Helms glinted in the borning dawn.

"Tell me of a night then, when you will be young. Tell me what you would do," Arthur said. "Speak me through to morn."

Myrddin's eyes marked the sun where it lay beneath the world and measured its rise against the Saxon hosts climbing below. "The day's magical instruction—in writing and reading and numerology—would be done. I would be fed and full—delicacies of bread and beef and cheese in a red sauce from a fruit not yet known—and I would go to my chariot—"

"Even young men have their own chariots?"

"Some. Mine is rusted and worn, once my mother's conveyance, but now too threadbare and loud for her. Still, its music is good, and it goes quickly."

"Every man a king," Arthur said, wistful. "And where are you bound, young Myrddin?"

"Marvin is the name I have taken," replies the mage with a rueful laugh. "More popular in that time than Myrddin—but not much. Where I am bound is to get another delicacy—fine cream mixed with eggs, the sweet essence of exotic canes, and a liqueur of a bean that will be discovered a millennium from now, in a hidden land on the other side of the world—all of it mixed and thickened by freezing."

"There is a hidden land? There is another side of the world?" Arthur wondered.

"More to the point, there is iced cream," Myrddin replied.

"And how does a young warrior attain this ambrosia?"

"An hour's work at low pay can buy enough for me and all my friends."

"What wealth! What bounty!" the king marveled. "What—friends?"

"Aye, friends, for I am not so scabby then. That is who I meet, three of them, outside the shop where the iced cream is sold," Myrddin said.

"Imagine me among them. I am imagining me among your far-future friends," Arthur said. "I want to be a young man again. I want to be a young king."

Myrddin knew Medraut's poison coiled black about the king's heart. "We walk together, down a paved lane. Shops of two and three stories rise all round us. Lanterns glow in every window and on posts among the slender trees. We walk and talk and joke, tease one another in the way of the young. The iced cream melts and warms us through until even the pastry around it is gone and we all stand to lick the last stickiness from our fingers—"

"I'm not going to last, Myrddin," Arthur said in sudden regret.

"You must," said the old wizard, fearful now. He kicked back the door, that dawn might break over the face of the king. "For we have paid already. We walk past paper bushels of burst and buttered grain—light as angel bread—and sink into warm soft seats. There, before us in the vast darkness, appear visions of a time long ago, of a king long ago, of a common man named Arthur, and the battle he fought at Camlaun. Every one of us there, even the boy that I will have become, will wish to be you."

The breaching sun broke upon the king's gray face.

"Did you hear me, Arthur?" cried Myrddin, possessed of a sudden mortal dread. "You dream of them even as they dream of you."

The grave-chill momently departed Arthur's eyes. "Then … they will remember me. Some will remember. They will remember this grimy, honest, fighting man—this common king." He shook once last, coldly, upon the pallet, his eyelids lit with morning. "O Beautiful Sun, welcome back to the world."

So saying, Arthur, King of Britons, breathed his last.

"Yes. They will remember. Thousands. Hundreds of thousands will remember the true you. When every man is a king and every woman a queen, history at last needs a common king. They will remember."

Even as the Saxons gained the hilltop, Myrddin stepped from the hovel's door and disappeared into the dawning light of morn.

J. Robert King, author of ten published novels and (sadly) quite a few others, still loves the short story most of all. This particular short story reawakened in him an interest in Arthurian lore, which has led to the novel Mad Merlin, *due from Tor in A.D. 2000. Yes, he remembers Arthur in his many manifestations, but most closely identifies with Merlin—thought to be a wizard, but in fact only a hard-pressed, hopeful, and diligent storyteller.*

Lady Gemcloak
Saryndalaghlothtor

The dwarves dubbed the moody but essentially gentle dragon "Lady Gemcloak" for her glittering appearance . . .

by
Ed Greenwood

illustrated by
Storn Cook

UNTIL THE NIGHT OF THE DRAGON DUEL, many citizens of Mirabar, longtime mining capital of the Sword Coast North, were unaware that they'd acquired a dragon protector. It was a still, damp evening in spring (of the Year of the Tankard, 1370 DR). The proprietors of The Watchful Axe alehouse were just about to harness their mules to the "round-and-rounds" that turned the blades of large fans that cooled patrons of their rooftop beer garden, when a golden glow appeared in the air overhead. It rapidly became a line of fire, "as if a scimitar was carving an arc out of the sky, and letting fire beyond spill through," as one watcher put it.

The line became a rift, opening in the air, and widened until it was as large across "as the length of the largest ships calling at Luskan to carry away the wares of Mirabar." Out of this fiery mouth flew a red dragon: an individual not seen before in the North, sages believe. None can agree on where it flew from or by what means it opened such a large gate in the sky (though the opinions most often muttered concerned the "crazed Cult of the Dragon mages" and "dabbling Red Wizards"), but all agree that it was large, sleek, and hungry.

As the rift that had brought it closed like a purposeful eyelid, the red dragon clapped its wings, reared upright in triumph, and swooped down on the city like a playful child. Roaring and banking over the tiled rooftops to slap tiles and slates alike into ruin with its tail, it laid waste to a dozen homes before the frantic booming of a bell was heard from the Crags just southwest of the city (specifically, from the bald height known as Crostar's Vigil). Moments later, another dragon erupted into the air from somewhere behind that sentinel pinnacle, "glittering like a shower of gold" in the sunset, and plunged down upon the red wyrm, taking it completely by surprise and pouncing on it with such fury that the red dragon was driven onto the flagspires of no less than six residences and transfixed.

The red freed itself with frantic thrashings, but not until after the newcomer, a crystal dragon, had bitten and torn viciously and enthusiastically at its underbelly. Dragon blood fell smoking into the streets as the red wyrm rose heavily into the air, flapping its wings in grim and obvious pain, and tried to fly away east up the Mirar.

The crystal wyrm pounced again, demonstrating its agility to the watching citizenry by folding its wings and dropping like a stone to avoid a sudden gout of fire and a furious midair charge, then buzzed around the red dragon as a small bird harries a crow out of its territory, biting and raking until its foe turned away. The crystal dragon darted after it, striking again and again, until the red dragon, trailing ribbons of blood, fled at last out to sea.

The crystal dragon followed, presumably to watch and prevent the red dragon's return, until its exhausted foe plunged into the waves and drowned. That red wyrm has been seen no more in Mirabar.

Speculation in the city as to the identity and whereabouts of the crystal dragon was intense, and normally shunned prospectors and miners were gifted with copious drinkables and questioned about the mysterious wyrm.

The story that emerged, once corroborations had been made and the more obvious fancies discarded, is thus: the crystal dragon Saryndalaghlothtor was now lairing in The Crags just southwest of Mirabar, so close as to be able to overlook the city. Her recent arrival was connected to the cessation of goblin raids on outlying steads and caravan encampments in the vicinity.

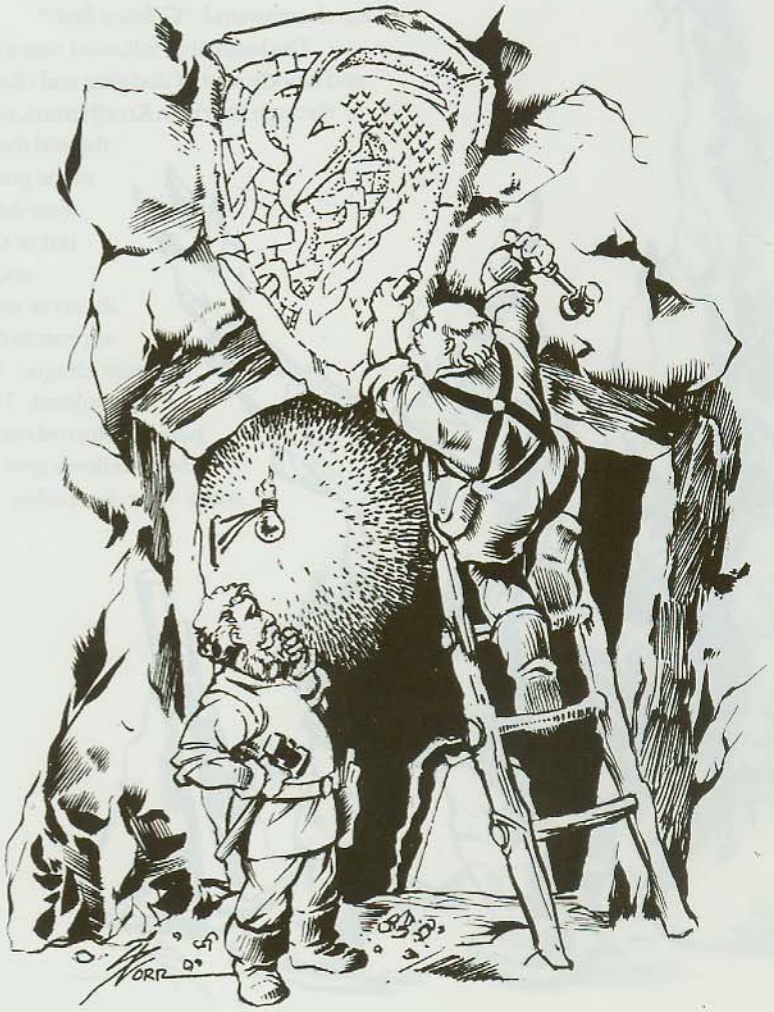
This unaccustomed peace befell shortly after overeager goblin mining caused an entire shoulder of mountainside to collapse into an underlying cavern (no doubt crushing scores of goblins in the process), and popular belief in Mirabar was that the "lurking goblins of The Crags" (long the bane of local dwarves) had well-nigh exterminated themselves.

The truth was less tidy, but as dramatic: the collapse created a huge cavemouth in the side of one of The Crags, laying open a vast cavern that had hitherto been the center of the gem-mine inhabited by the Kreeth goblin tribe.

That cavern led into a string of large caves, from which many mining tunnels ran outwards into soft, damp rock pockmarked by many geodelike natural chambers lined with gem-crystals. For years the goblins had tunneled steadily onwards and outwards, mining abundant gems of many sorts; rubies and beljurils were among their most numerous yields. The spawn of Kreeth tunneled slyly into the cellars of Mirabar, too, and made many night forays into the city, in disguise, whispering into the ears of the most desperate and impoverished humans. After many unsuccessful attempts to subvert citizens, the goblins reached secret agreements with some of the more impoverished Mirabarran gem-traders (in particular, the once-proud but now poor human families of Gulathkond and Jammaer), supplying them with gems brought directly into their cellars. In return, the humans paid the goblins handsomely in food, weapons, furs, leatherwork, and mining tools, covering their activities with false words of new alliances with prospectors working out of the Ten Towns.

Freed from the need to undertake dangerous food-hunts on the surface and in the Underdark, the Kreeth goblins flourished, striking against any dwarves or human prospectors of Mirabar unwise enough to investigate The Crags too closely. Tales of their savagery and traps spread around the city, and few folk felt moved to investigate matters personally. "Breakneck" pits—deep, narrow clefts equipped with sharpened stone spurs and covered with old tarpaulins concealed under handfuls of gravel, and held up with rotting saplings—were commonplace Kreeth work, and still stud the heights of The Crags within sight of the city, awaiting the unwary.

The appearance of the cave changed all that. It occurred at a time of year when many young, displaced, or simply restless dragons wandered the vast



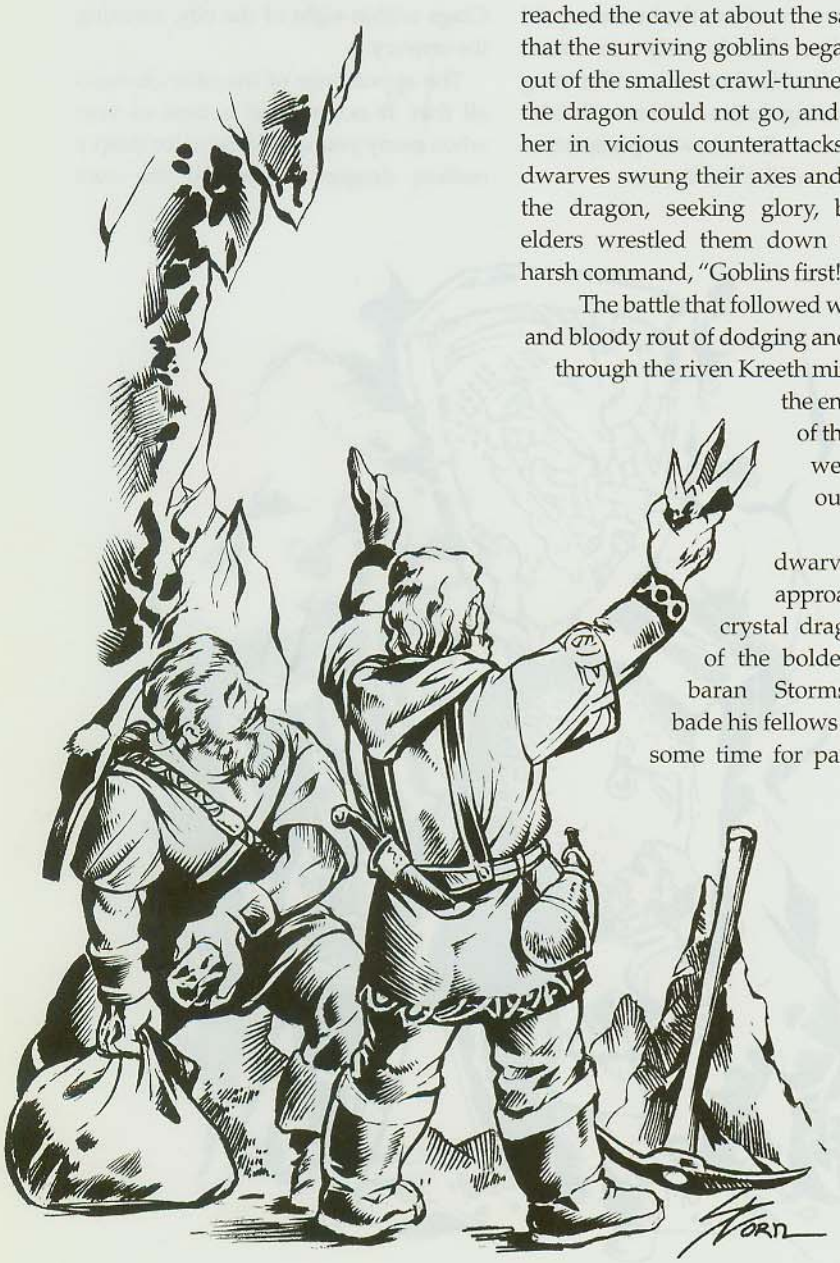
wilderlands of the North, hoping that the legends of the mighty wyrms who claim them as domains were overblown or out-of-date, and that new territories could be carved out of the seemingly endless forested hills and crags.

One such wanderer, an adult crystal she-dragon, found the raw, new scar in the rock almost at the gates of Mirabar and boldly dove down into the dazed remnants of the goblins, whom she slaughtered at will. They were too few and too terrified to strike at her from their small side-tunnels as Saryndalaghlothtor roamed the larger caves, devouring exposed gem-ores and thinking she'd found some sort of crystal dragons' paradise. It had been a long and storm-wracked flight from the wastes of northern Raurin, but the ordeal, it seemed, had been worth it.

The arrival of the dragon had gone unnoticed in Mirabar, but the rumbling collapse that preceded it by a day or so had not. Many Mirabarran dwarves thought it imperative that the tumult be investigated, but the known menace of the goblins made necessary the whelming of a warband; eager younglings were sternly prevented from "just hiking up for a look" by their elders.

In the end, the armed dwarven force reached the cave at about the same time that the surviving goblins began to dart out of the smallest crawl-tunnels, where the dragon could not go, and strike at her in vicious counterattacks. A few dwarves swung their axes and charged the dragon, seeking glory, but their elders wrestled them down with the harsh command, "Goblins first!"

The battle that followed was a long and bloody rout of dodging and chasing through the riven Kreeth mine, but in the end the last of the goblins were driven out or slain, and the dwarves warily approached the crystal dragon. One of the boldest, Haelbaran Stormshoulder, bade his fellows give him some time for parley, and then strode out and shared a dream with the wyrm: if she'd grant the Mirabarran dwarves permission to mine freely in her lair, defend it against intruders, and even to dwell in certain of its reaches, they'd feed her all the gems and metals she desired.



The dragon considered Stormshoulder's words, then accepted the bargain with calm words. Not quite believing their good fortune, and knowing that many Mirabarrans would be rather less accepting of a dragon dwelling nigh their gates, the dwarves elected to keep word of the deal as quiet as possible. Many told relatives in the city, but it's likely that not a single human heard of it. Humans, in particular, regard Mithral Hall as a foe endangering their traditional prosperity; it's likely they'd be even more furious with a dwarven hold right next door. So in the city, the returning Mirabarran dwarves gave out the grim news that The Crags held no new mine, but only "goblin despoil and devastation" that would take years to cleanse, and was best avoided. Mirabar heard and believed, and The House of the Axe was founded.

The dwarves dubbed the moody but essentially gentle dragon "Lady Gemcloak" for her glittering appearance, and later "The Axemother," as they came to see her as the "mother" under whose protection they could found a new city or tribe. She seemed happy to eat flawed and shattered gems and low-grade, leaden metal ores and rust scraps, and she and the dwarves soon came to trust each other. Word is spreading among dwarves across the North (and as far south as Waterdeep and Daggerford) of "a new hold" where dwarves of no famous clan or lineage can win a place among fellows in prosperity and ever-growing power. If the swelling ranks of dwarves dwelling all around her bothers Lady Gemcloak, she gives no sign of it.

The only thing that does seem to irk her is her feeble magic. When unaided by enchanted items, she can cast but a single first-level wizard spell per day, though she has quite a roster of such spells to choose among. Dwarves who've talked long with her (in particular, Tarltus Ulforge, and his sister

Shaelee) say that one of the things that caused Saryndalaghlothtor to roam the north in the first place was the legend of Argaut's Brain.

Briefly put, this recurring belief holds that anyone who finds and eats the brain of this long-dead (but magically preserved) archwizard gains his mastery of magic. Elminster confirms that this legend was born of wild apprentices' tales and given strength by an even more fanciful ballad; as far as he knows, the resting-place of Argaut is lost, and he was no better preserved than most men who die suddenly. Moreover, the central belief, he insists, is false.

Volo also believes the tale is wishful thinking. Some secret writings happened to briefly fall into his hands at a recent nobles' revel in Waterdeep: a report of experiments carried out by certain members of the Arcane Brotherhood. Their conclusions indicate that devouring dead mages' brains leads sometimes to illness or even insanity and sometimes transfers confused memories (scenes of places, people, or even events), but never coherent information or lore.

Just how seriously Saryndalaghlothtor searched for Argaut's brain, or believed the tale, the dwarves know not … and Lady Gemcloak isn't telling.

She is known to be one of the crystal dragons who can communicate with any intelligent creature—and, according to the dwarves, she is in no hurry to roam again or to acquire a mate. Saryndalaghlothtor considers a very small area (Mirabar and a modest stretch of the Crags) her domain, but she defends it fiercely. Other dragons, predators of all sorts—including greedy humans—and anyone the House of the Axe dwarves don't want around are considered unwanted intruders and dealt with accordingly. Lady Gemcloak is vicious in battle and enjoys maiming and spectacularly slaying foes. (Dismemberments and crushings are favorite tactics.)

Saryndalaghlothtor's Lair

As is the way of dwarves, the inhabitants of the House of the Axe have named the larger caverns, strategic passageways, and waymoots of the ever-expanding gem-mine. Most of these names they keep secret from outsiders, but Volo learned that there are at least six linked caverns that Saryndalaghlothtor can traverse. The westernmost (and innermost) the dwarves call "Homehold," and it serves as their meeting place and staging/work area. Moving eastward, one comes to "Wyrmslumber" (where the Axemother likes to curl up and sleep on a bed of gems; it is the largest of all the caverns, but has an eastern opening that is a tight squeeze for Saryndalaghlothtor and would halt the passage of any larger dragon), "Theller's Anvil" (though Theller and his anvil are now elsewhere, in smaller caves to the west), "Blackrun," "Eldock's Rest," and "The Maw," where the cavemouth created by overzealous goblin mining looks east out of the shoulder of Bryn Crag.

The dwarves have left undisturbed the various goblin pit traps on the surface slopes around the lair. In addition, they added a few of their own, including "roll-boulder" deadfalls on high ledges all around The Maw (a succession of large rocks that can be rolled off a ledge to plunge down on intruders below) and "rockfalls" (stone slab ceilings on the major passages leading away from the Maw—including The Slither, the main route used by Saryndalaghlothtor—that can be winched aside to allow tons of loose rock above them to fall and block the way).

An underground spring feeds pools in the southwestern-most reaches of the mine, and the dwarves are thought to cache many of the best gems to the northwest. Although the House dwarves have fewer elders and "old rank" families than established dwarven realms, a few "Dwarves of the Ring" hold absolute authority. Prominent among the more active and warlike are Corthold Flamehand and his sister Ieilhalla; strong among the more stay-at-home and artistic are the master forgers Theller and Auldrymbrei. They seldom bark commands unless the House is at war, but dwarves who disobey or ignore them are expelled from the House. The Ring has kept iron control over the release of gems, keeping prices high and reducing the chance that some greedy human force or other—the Arcane Brotherhood of Luskan, for example—might learn how rich the House is and decide to seize it for their own. For the same reason, the Ring absolutely forbids visitors to penetrate the House beyond the Maw or to take up residence in the mine.

The dwarven accommodations are located in smaller outlying tunnels, mainly to the north (where anyone tunneling or skulking in from Mirabar is noticed), and are always guarded by way-sentries equipped with alarm-gongs and warhorns. Many sentry-posts are equipped with small rockfall devices that the sentries can trigger to bar the way they guard and prevent invasions.

Saryndalaghlothtor's Domain

The Maw opens to the surface on the eastern face of Bryn Crag, which stands just west of The Long Road, shielded from the view of travelers by Old Man Crag (so named for its resemblance to the weathered face of a giant buried in the earth up to his neck, staring endlessly east across the road at Barlaerl's Crag). From this point, Saryndalaghlothtor roams the water-meadows of the River Mirar north over the city as far as the eye can see (about six miles), as well as a sweep of the Crags from Tannath's Tor in the southwest to Ammirar's Blade to the northeast (a length of some nine miles and forty or so pinnacles and peaks).

The Axemother cares little about human or dwarven activity in her domain that doesn't actually involve invading her lair with raised weapons and threatening words, but she reacts to any dragon or goblin incursion by bursting from her lair in all-out attack. She loves to pounce, but isn't as reckless as she seems, and she can seldom be duped into plunging into a waiting trap or a situation where she can be cornered by a prepared and alert foe.

The Doings of Saryndalaghlothtor

Lady Gemcloak, like all of her kind, enjoys dining on metallic ores and gems of all sorts, but she indulges in occasional "blood meals" of goblins, wyverns, or other creatures who challenge her. She hunts the skies over Mirabar and down the Mirar valley and does not hesitate to pursue foes out to sea or over the Evermoors. The Mirar is her favorite watering-hole, though she often drinks from meltwater pools high in the Crags or the many small lakes that lie in the bogs to the north of the Mirar.

Saryndalaghlothtor spends a typical day dozing on her bed of gems, chatting with dwarves (who bring her news of doings in Mirabar and the wider Sword Coast North, traders passing through her domain in particular). She'll take to the air for a short "wingstretch and sniff the wind" flight (often at twilight or in concealing mists or rain) once every day or two if she can, and she takes an active interest in the development of the mine and her dwarven "children."

Saryndalaghlothtor's Magic

Among Lady Gemcloak's store of written spells are many beyond her mastery and a huge array of first-level magics. Most are old spells, rarely found these days. She commands only a modest hoard but is known to possess a rare and powerful item, described hereafter, which she keeps well hidden, knowing she can't herself use its full effects but that they could be used against her to devastating effect.

Helm of Supreme Wizardry

This ornate, fluted "sallet"-style helm is of steel plated with a silver alloy and alters to fit the head of any creature donning it.

A *helm of supreme wizardry* allows any being already able to cast wizard spells who wears it to temporarily cast two "extra" spells of each level from sixth through ninth; spells must be memorized and cast in the usual manner (with all necessary components), and as each one is unleashed the wearer loses 1d6+1 hit points (a loss that may be regained through normal healing). The helm doesn't allow wearers access to spells or spell levels they don't already have.

This usage must occur within a half-day period; that is, the helm must be donned, spells memorized, and then cast, all within a continuous 12-hour period. If any "helm-extra" spells remain uncast at the end of this time, all memorized spells are instantly lost by the helm wearer (previously-memorized, normally attainable magics as well as the additional spells made possible by the helm's augmentation).

If a *helm of supreme wizardry* is ever used (not merely worn, but called upon to allow memorization of even a single "extra" spell) twice in a tenday by the same being, the wearer permanently loses one point of Intelligence (the moment the second memorization is attempted). If it is ever used more than once in any month (continuous 30-day-period) by the same wearer to memorize extra spells of the same school, the wearer suffers permanent loss of 1 point of Intelligence and 1 hit point per spell school. For instance, if the helm was used to memorize an extra *antimagic shell* and *chain lightning*, and then used again twenty-eight days later to memorize the same two "extra" spells, the helm would do so, and the spells function properly, but the moment the second pair of offending spells were memorized, the wearer would permanently lose 2 points of Intelligence and 2 hit points. So long as the helm is worn, spells memorized with its aid are retained and usable, even if Intelligence loss renders them normally unattainable by the wearer.

XP Value: 90,000 **GP Value:** 450,000

Saryndalaghlothtor's Fate

Lady Gemcloak is likely to receive severe battle-testings at the hands of greedy adventurers (sponsored by Mirabarran mining families or the Arcane Brotherhood of Luskan, if by no one else), and might also be a magnet for dwarves desiring to join a "new" hold (free of old feuds and bitter clan memories) and goblins desiring revenge ... and where goblins rush in, orcs usually follow.

Saryndalaghlothtor might swiftly perish if she rejects offers of alliances and aid from the Dragon Queen or other friendly wyrms (for instance, the reclusive Thalagyrt—whom we'll look at next month—possesses a spell, *gemfire*, that The Axemother would find very useful), dwarven adventuring bands, and the like—for news of the whereabouts and gem-rich properties of her lair is certain to reach unfriendly draconic ears eventually ...

Ed Greenwood hasn't watched television regularly in years. He doesn't need to; if he wants to see fantastic scenes unfolding on a lighted screen, he turns on his computer and writes another article about the FORGOTTEN REALMS® *setting. His wife reports that he manages, these days, to keep his chortling under control—but his players doubt that.*

Giants from the Grave

Giant opponents could always be worse . . . they could be undead.

by
Gregory W. Detwiler

illustrated by
Stephen Schwartz

GIANTS: THE PERSONIFICATION OF SHEER BRUTE POWER, combined with human intelligence in a lethal combination that terrifies PCs and NPCs alike. Clearly strange powers were at work when giants were created, yet they often come off as mere people writ large, and die accordingly. Giants have innate magic in their bodies, for they could not support their own weight by muscle power alone. If humans can spawn many strange forms of undead beings after they die, then how much stranger would be the forms of undead giants?

Due to their innate magical nature, undead giants are much more than overgrown human undead, and each giant species has its own specific undead form. The species-specific undead forms for the six original AD&D® giants appear on the following pages.

Adventures involving these undead giants naturally include the standard horrid-monster-ravages-the-countryside scenario, but things can become much more complicated. Since these creatures are as likely to attack their former kin as anyone else, the PCs might actually be approached by a weakened clan of giants seeking help against the assaults of their undead former members. This scenario is especially likely in the case of the good-aligned storm giants, but if desperate enough, giants of any alignment might seek help.

Roleplayers might appreciate the bargaining sessions that ensue when evil giants beg for help against their un-dead kin, with the dickering over payment (and ensuring that said payment is forthcoming after the battle) being an adventure in itself.

The PCs might blunder into the realm of an undead giant unknowingly. In addition to the monsters presented here, dead giants can turn into normal undead such as giant skeletons or zombies, so giant clans might choose to bury their dead far away from the community. Also, because wizards and priests can use the *animate dead* spell to raise giant corpses, the survivors might take care to ensure that the graves of their kin are unmarked and quite natural in appearance. Like everyone else, giants don't relish the thought of a would-be necromancer making the rounds of the local cemeteries.

Greg Detwiler has a giant contributor file. Whether it becomes undead one day . . .

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any hills and mountains
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Night
DIET:	See below
INTELLIGENCE:	Low (5–7)
TREASURE:	D
ALIGNMENT:	Chaotic evil

NO. APPEARING:	1–3
ARMOR CLASS:	2
MOVEMENT:	10
HIT DICE:	13
THAC0:	7
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1–8 +7 or by weapon (2–16 + 7)
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Energy drain, hurling rocks for 2–20 (2d10)
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Hit only by silver or +1 or better magical weapon
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	See below
SIZE:	H (16' tall)
MORALE:	Elite (14)
XP VALUE:	12,000

Barrowes are undead hill giants, even uglier than their living counterparts. They go about naked but do not seem to be so, for their bodies sport a thick growth of matted, filthy hair. This thick fur, allied with the toughness of their undead hide, gives them an armor class of 2. Their eyes glitter like those of all undead, but because the eyes are small, and because the giant stoops over so much, it is often hard to make them out at a distance, leading to disastrous errors in identification.

Combat: Barrowes can use any attack form they did in life, being slightly stronger in undead form. They inflict 1d8 + 7 hp damage per hit. They cause 2d8 + 7 hp damage when wielding a weapon, and boulders they hurl inflict 2d20 hp damage. They have a maximum range of 250 yards when hurling boulders. Due to a loss of Dexterity that comes with undeath, barrowes cannot catch hurled boulders. Barrowes can be struck only by weapons of +1 enchantment or better, unless the nonmagical weapon is of silvered steel. They suffer 2d4 hp damage per vial of holy water.

After a successful melee attack with an unarmed fist, barrowes drain one experience level unless the victim saves vs. death magic. Anyone totally drained in this manner becomes a miniature barrowe, undergoing a shocking transformation. The victim sheds his clothes or sees them ripped or split off as his body becomes overly muscular, hunchbacked, and apelike. He also gains all the powers of a barrowe except those of great Strength and boulder-hurling, but he retains only half of his Hit Dice. (Note: A barrowe can make another true barrowe only by slaying another giant with its energy-draining attack.) Due to the stupidity of hill giants, however, any barrowes thus created are not controlled by their slayer, wandering off to find lairs.

Barrowes are immune to all mind-affecting spells, as well as *sleep*, *hold*, poison, paralyzation, or cold-based attacks. A *raise dead* spell, however, instantly slays the monster. Barrowes are intolerant of bright sunlight and actively avoid it, although it does them no real harm.

Habitat/Society: These creatures exist alone or in small groups, placing no value on the company of others. Their lairs in death are much the same as in life: caverns and other gloomy hill-country lairs, such as deep forests.

Barrowes have no fondness for their living kin. They frequently go out of their way to wipe out a former family, tribe, or raiding band, just for the satisfaction of breaking it up. Remember, the barrowe gains no followers when it creates more of its kind: the new undead simply wander away. The only pleasure a barrowe knows comes from breaking up the formerly close-knit bonds of its kin, causing them to separate and become as lonely as it is.

Ecology: Barrowes exist as much on the Negative Material Plane as on the Prime. The negative energy from the former plane sustains them and provides their life-draining abilities, though they achieve as much satisfaction draining a living being as they once gained from filling an empty stomach. Their only impact on a region's ecology is to ensure that it has none: Animals sense the undead presence and flee the area, while the local vegetation slowly withers and dies within a quarter-mile of the creature's lair. Some sages speculate that using the parts of a barrowe in the production of an otherwise standard *potion of hill giant strength* grants the imbiber energy-draining abilities as well as increased strength, but so far as is known, no one has been foolhardy enough to try it.

Cairn

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Sub-tropical and temperate mountains
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Night
DIET:	See below
INTELLIGENCE:	Average (8–10)
TREASURE:	D
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral evil
NO. APPEARING:	1–3
ARMOR CLASS:	–2
MOVEMENT:	10
HIT DICE:	15
THAC0:	5
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1–10 + 8 or by weapon (2–16 + 8)
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Hurling rocks for 3–36 (3d12), surprise
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	+2 or better weapon to hit, surprised only on a 1
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	See below
SIZE:	H (18' tall)
MORALE:	Champion (16)
XP VALUE:	14,000

Except for their glowing eyes, cairns seem no different from living stone giants, largely because their flesh resembles stone. Thus, when the creature's eyes are closed or otherwise not visible to an observer, it can be virtually impossible to tell the difference between a living stone giant and an undead one. Given their appearance and stiff movements, cairns could be mistaken for large stone golems. Cairns are not mindless undead but beings with as much intelligence as they had in life.

Combat: Cairns have a keen telepathic sense that enables them to tell when someone comes near even when that person is silent and/or invisible. They make good use of this when waiting for victims in ambush positions, closing their bright, betraying eyes and blending in with the rocky background until the intruders come close enough to attack. Because of the giant's stony appearance, victims have a –5 penalty to their surprise rolls when they encounter a cairn underground. Often the first hint of trouble is when large boulders start whizzing past them, hurled with incredible force (3d12 hp damage instead of 3d10 for live stone giants) to a range of 350 yards. Cairns inflict more damage with physical blows and weapons than they did in life, causing 1d10 + 8 or 2d8 + 8 hp damage respectively. Their undead nature penalizes them with a loss of Dexterity, however, and cairns cannot catch hurled stones and other large missiles as they did in life.

Cairns are slow but formidable opponents. Aside from their excellent armor class, they are immune to all weapons that are not of +2 or better enchantment. They are also immune to mind-affecting magic, *sleep*, *hold*, petrification, poison, paralyzation, and cold- and earth-based attacks. Holy water harms them; each vial inflicts 2–8 hp damage. The *stone to flesh* spell reduces their armor class to 0 (as it was in life) for a full turn (10 combat rounds), while *transmute rock to mud* actually reduces it to 7 for the same period of time. Note that weapons of +2 or better enchantment are still needed to damage the creature. *Raise dead* slays a cairn instantly, and although sunlight does not harm these creatures, they abhor and actively avoid it.

Habitat/Society: Cairns dwell in mountain caverns, just as they did in life. They never dwell in groups of more than three, however, and even these small gatherings are rare. Undeath brings with it a sense of isolation and desire for solitude. Some cairns deliberately distance themselves from their former clans to eliminate the possibility that they will return and destroy their old families in a jealous rage at the fact that they are still alive.

Ecology: Cairns have no effect on the local ecology, for they eat nothing, being sustained wholly by energy from the Negative Material Plane. Animals sense the presence of these giant undead and stay away, but these creatures generally choose the bleakest and most lifeless regions in which to dwell anyway. Although any vegetation within a quarter-mile of a cairn's lair withers in a matter of months, they lair in areas with little or no vegetation, to begin with. Their body parts are favored by mages who seek to make magical items connected with petrification or stone-based spells, and research is being conducted into the mysterious inner sense that lets them know when intruders are approaching, as such a power might be used in the construction of *ESP*-related items or potions.

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Arctic lands
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	See below
DIET:	See below
INTELLIGENCE:	Low (5)
TREASURE:	E
ALIGNMENT:	Chaotic evil

NO. APPEARING:	1–2
ARMOR CLASS:	0
MOVEMENT:	12
HIT DICE:	15
THAC0:	5
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1–10 + 9 or by weapon (2–20 + 9)
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Freezing touch, hurling rocks for 2–24 (2d12)
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Impervious to cold, +2 or better weapon to hit
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	See below
SIZE:	H (21' tall)
MORALE:	Champion (16)
XP VALUE:	14,000

Frostmourns are undead frost giants whose bodily tissues were completely desiccated by the intense cold of their environment. The things look like giant withered corpses with facial hair. Their eyes have an evil gleam common to all undead. A frostmourn can turn itself into a swirling white cloud or miniature blizzard but can't attack in the former shape.

Combat: Undeath gives frostmourns both increased Strength and decreased Dexterity. Thus, although they can hurl boulders to a distance of 250 yards, inflicting 2d12 hp damage, they can no longer catch similar missiles as they could in life. Greater Strength also means they cause more damage in melee combat, whether with weapons (2d20 + 9 hp damage) or the naked hand (1d10 + 9 hp damage).

Some frostmourns wear their old armor, but this is due to force of habit and nothing more, for their desiccated flesh is now so tough that they always have an armor class of 0, armor or no armor.

The most potent attack of a frostmourn is its freezing touch. If the victim does not save vs. death magic when touched by the giant, he suffers an additional 2d20 hp damage; making the saving throw reduces the damage by half. In addition, all metallic items (weapons, armor, metallic flasks, or other containers, etc.) must save vs. cold or become brittle, falling apart almost immediately. Those slain by a frostmourn cannot be revived with a *raise dead* spell; a *resurrection* spell, however, works normally.

These creatures retain their immunity to cold-based attacks, and their undead status likewise gives them immunity to mind-affecting magic, *sleep*, *hold*, paralyzation, and poison. Fire-based attacks, however, inflict double damage, and a vial of holy water splashed on the frostmourn inflicts 2–8 hp damage. A *raise dead* spell slays a frostmourn instantly.

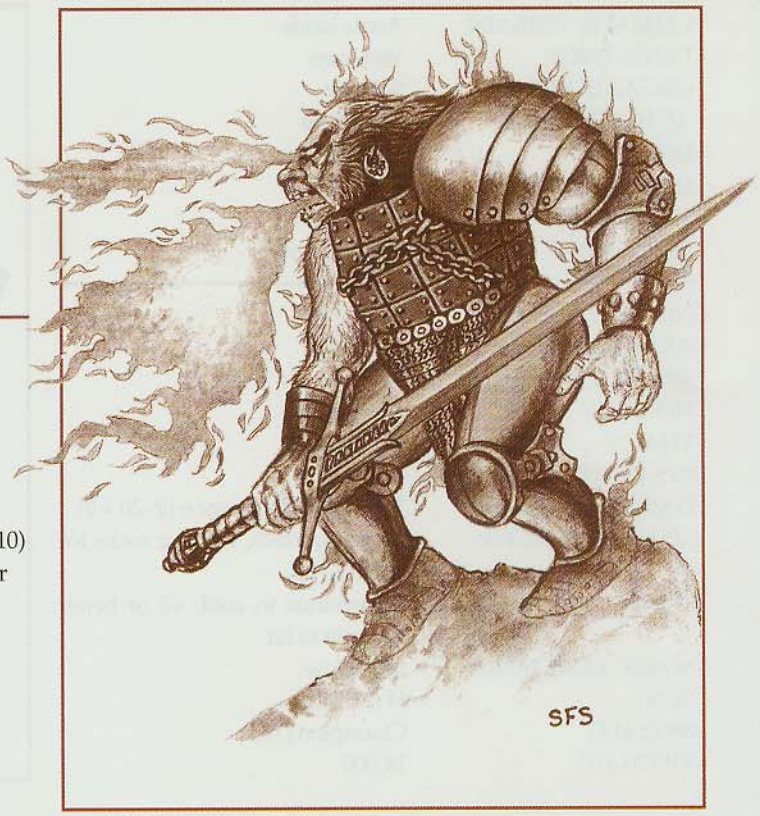
Like most undead, frostmourns detest sunlight and actively avoid it, even though it causes them no harm. In the chill northern environments they call home, however, the sun is often blotted out in the daytime by blizzards or thick cloud cover, so these creatures can come out in the daytime on those occasions. In addition, once far enough north, the sun goes down for months at a time when true winter comes around; PCs who neglect their research and sit around praying for the sun to drive off their undead enemies are in for a disappointment.

Habitat/Society: Frostmourns are largely solitary creatures, although a quarter of all frostmourn lairs have two residents instead of one. All undead tend to hate companionship, and their innately chaotic nature only intensifies this hate. Frostmourns often seek out and destroy the enemies of their old tribe or clan, but they are just as likely to hunt their former kin.

Ecology: Life is less abundant in the frigid north than in the warmer lowlands. The barren conditions often disguise the desolation left by a frostmourn. Newcomers to the area can easily find themselves unknowingly trampling through the lair of these dangerous monsters. As they are sustained by the energy of the Negative Material Plane, frostmourns have no need to eat. Wizards often use their body parts as material components for cold-based spells or in the construction of cold related magical items. Their desiccated hides are used in experiments to create the equivalent of magical leather armor that also gives immunity to cold-based attacks, but so far as is known, no successes have been achieved.

Firegaunt

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any temperate, subtropical, tropical
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	See below
INTELLIGENCE:	Low (5)
TREASURE:	E
ALIGNMENT:	Lawful evil
NO. APPEARING:	1–2
ARMOR CLASS:	–1
MOVEMENT:	12
HIT DICE:	16
THAC0:	5
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1–10 + 10 or by weapon (2–24 + 10)
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Burning touch, hurling rocks for 2–24 (2d12)
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Impervious to fire, +2 or better weapon to hit
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	See below
SIZE:	H (18' tall)
MORALE:	Champion (16)
XP VALUE:	15,000



Firegaunts are undead fire giants who have deteriorated spectacularly. Their jaws jut out in a pronounced muzzle, giving them a vaguely baboonlike appearance. They also give off a sulfuric stench. Their eyes and tongues have completely rotted away, and small portions of flesh on their body and limbs have decomposed and vanished. Out of these holes pour tongues of flame several feet in length, while what remains of their physical bodies is covered with rippling tongues of flame. Thick clouds of smoke hang low above the creatures. The overall effect is quite horrifying. Some of these undead giants still wear the same armor they wore in life, though holes have melted through it in those places where tongues of flame erupt from their decaying bodies.

Combat: With or without their armor, firegaunts are always armor class –1. Their undead nature has increased their Strength due to an influx of energy from the Negative Material Plane, while at the same time reducing their Dexterity. They can hurl boulders to a distance of 250 yards that cause 2d12 hp damage per boulder that hits, but they can no longer catch boulders. Their great Strength also means that they inflict 1d10 + 10 hp damage with their bare hands alone, while a weapon enables them to inflict 2d12 + 10 hp damage per blow. In addition, their fiery nature means that any creature they touch with their bare hands must save vs. spell or else suffer 2d20 hp damage from burning (half that if the saving throw is made). Possessions of the burned victim must saves vs. magical fire or be destroyed. Anyone killed by a firegaunt is immolated in flames and reduced to ash; only a *resurrection* spell or more powerful magic can restore victims slain in this manner.

Firegaunts are immune to all fire-based attacks. Water- and cold-based attacks inflict double damage, and holy water inflicts 2–8 hp damage per vial splashed on the monster. Mind-affecting magic, *hold*, *sleep*, poison, and paralyzation attacks are all useless against these creatures, but *raise dead* slays a firegaunt instantly. Sunlight doesn't bother them, partially because they are already adapted to constant light from the flames shooting out of them, and partly because of the continuous shade each creature's cloud of smoke provides. Thus, these undead can come out at any time, day or night, though night attacks are the most spectacular.

Habitat/Society: Firegaunts are loners, with no more than two of these creatures ever dwelling together. Indeed, with flames in their sockets instead of eyes, they seem incapable of admiring familiar or beautiful sights, although they never have trouble finding their victims during an attack. Firegaunts often go on long, seemingly aimless rampages, burning and slaying everything in their path, including their former kinsmen.

Ecology: Firegaunts tend to burn everything in sight. Though initially destructive, this burning often promotes new growth in forest or grasslands, which in turn provides more nourishment to the local herbivores, upon whom the local carnivores feed. Firegaunts themselves have no need of food, being sustained entirely by energy from the Negative Material Plane. Their body parts are useful in any fire-based magical research. Immersing a bottle in a firegaunt's internal fires for an unspecified period of time is said to be one means of producing an *eversmoking bottle*.

Spectral Cloud

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any mountains or magical cloud islands
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	See below
INTELLIGENCE:	Very (12)
TREASURE:	E, Q (×5)
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral evil

NO. APPEARING:	1–2
ARMOR CLASS:	0
MOVEMENT:	18, fly 36 (E)
HIT DICE:	18
THAC0:	5
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	2–16
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Energy drain, hurling rocks for 3–30 (3d10)
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	+3 or better weapon to hit
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	See below
SIZE:	H (24' tall or 24' radius)
MORALE:	Fanatic (18)
XP VALUE:	16,000

A spectral cloud frequently appears as a swirling mass of brilliant white vapors, like a regular cloud lit by the sun. When preparing for combat, it takes the form of a gaseous, 24' tall humanoid, revealing its origins as an undead cloud giant. In humanoid form, its gleaming eyes light up its face; in cloud form, those eyes can be seen in the exact center of the swirling mass. Spectral clouds are capable of flight when in cloud form. The speed given above is how fast they can fly under their own power; when a strong wind blows in the direction they want to go, they can achieve even greater speeds.

Combat: In physical combat, spectral clouds attack with a single blow of their gaseous, chilling hands, inflicting 2d8 hp damage. In addition, unless the victim makes his saving throw vs. death magic, he loses one life level to an energy-draining attack, affecting skills, spells known, etc. Living creatures who are slain by spectral clouds become small spectral clouds—only real giants killed by energy-draining attacks can actually become true spectral clouds. Spectral clouds formed in this manner can assume either the gaseous humanoid or cloudlike form of their creator, but they lack the telekinetic ability given below. These imitations are under the control of their slayer as half-strength spectral clouds, inflicting 1–8 hp damage per attack. If their slayer and master is destroyed, they become free-willed undead monsters in their own right.

Spectral clouds have a limited telekinetic attack that enables them to levitate boulders and hurl them at an enemy up to 300 yards away, causing 3d10 hp damage. This power, however, cannot be used to catch or deflect large missiles.

Spectral clouds are immune to mind-affecting spells, *hold*, *sleep*, poison, paralyzation, death, and cold-based attacks. In addition, normal and relatively weak magical weapons simply pass through their gaseous bodies; weapons of +3 enchantment or better are needed to harm their airy forms. Holy water inflicts 2–8 hp damage per vial, and a *raise dead* spell slays it outright. A spectral cloud's ancestry, however, makes it immune to sunlight, making it one of the comparatively few undead who roam about in broad daylight as well as at night. It often soars among the clouds at high speed, just one cloud among many; characters who own a *carpet of flying* or similar item should take heed of this phenomenon.

Habitat/Society: Spectral clouds have no true society, being as solitary as other undead. They like to haunt or destroy their old clans, doing so out of sheer envy of their kin who revel in the pleasures of life.

Ecology: Spectral clouds have no true function in the environment, other than to diminish it by slaying everything that crosses their paths. Animals sense their presence and avoid them, but few adventurers notice this phenomenon, as spectral clouds make their lairs at the very tops of mountain peaks, where little life is to be found, anyway. They do not eat, though they enjoy draining the life from their victims. Spectral cloud essence is said to be useful in making a *potion of gaseous form*, while some mages are trying to find a way to entrap these intelligent (if gaseous) undead in bottles, as an interesting substitute for the *efreeti bottle*.

Temperament

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Mountain peaks, cloud islands, sea caverns
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	See below
INTELLIGENCE:	Exceptional (16)
TREASURE:	E, Q (×10), S
ALIGNMENT:	Chaotic evil
NO. APPEARING:	1
ARMOR CLASS:	–6
MOVEMENT:	12, swim 12, fly 15 (E)
HIT DICE:	21
THAC0:	5
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	2–20 + 12 or by weapon (3–36 + 12)
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Energy-draining lightning bolt
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Impervious to electricity, +3 or better weapon to hit
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	See below
SIZE:	G (26' tall)
MORALE:	Fanatic (18)
XP VALUE:	21,000

Temperaments are undead storm giants. Their skin is the deep black of a thunderhead just before an electrical storm. Sparks and lightning bolts, neon blue in color, dance along their bodies, while larger lightning bolts several yards in length constantly shoot forth from the eyes and mouth. When they are outside, they can summon at will a miniature thunderhead above their heads to enshroud them in their own private thunderstorm. It doesn't inflict damage in combat, but it's frightfully impressive, especially at night. They can also take the form of a crackling thunderhead, though in that case, the only attack they can make is the lightning strike listed below. The giant's movement rate in this form is 15, but all other attributes remain the same.

Combat: Temperaments have one physical attack per round: either a blow from a lightning-sheathed fist that inflicts 2d10 + 12 hp damage, or a weapon strike that inflicts up to 3d12 + 12 hp damage on the foe. Unlike other undead giants, they cannot hurl boulders.

Once per round, in lieu of a physical attack, a temperament may shoot a massive bolt of blue lightning. This lightning strike inflicts 4d10 hp damage to the victim, or half that if a saving throw vs. wands is successful. Making a second save vs. death magic protects the victim from the energy-draining properties of this lightning bolt, which steals one level away from the target. (Unlike other undead giants, temperaments can only make an energy draining attack as part of a lightning strike, not by physically touching the victim.) Those who are slain by this attack become half-strength temperaments under the control of their slayer. Giants are an exception to this, becoming regular temperaments. The electrical attack of these new recruits inflicts only 1d8 hp damage, while their Strength is no greater than it was in life. Upon the death of their "creator," these new monsters become free-willed undead who wander off to find their own lairs.

Temperaments are immune to both cold- and electrical-based attacks, as well as mind-affecting magic, *sleep*, *hold*, poison, death, and paralyzation. Holy water inflicts 2–8 hp damage per vial, and a *raise dead* spell utterly destroys them. Normal weapons, or magical ones of less than +3 enchantment, do not harm them. Although they wear no armor, their skin is desiccated to the point that it has a natural armor class of –6. These undead creatures are immune to sunlight and are not bothered by it in the least. This is partly because of their light-producing electrical nature but also because the small thunderhead that they invariably summon up when they go outside provides them with ample shade.

Habitat/Society: Temperaments are the most solitary of all undead giants; they are only found alone. The only exceptions are half-strength creatures created by the slaying of other giants, and these are not true equals. Temperaments often make revenge attacks on their former families, wiping them out so as to deny them the pleasures of life.

Ecology: Temperaments eat no food and are sustained entirely by energy from the Negative Material Plane. They do, however, obtain satisfaction from draining the life energy of living things. All animals sense the presence of these undead monsters and shun the areas they call home; temperaments dwell in the same places where storm giants do. Temperament bone or essence is considered just the thing for the finest quality *wands of lightning*, or a nonmetallic *ring of shocking grasp*.

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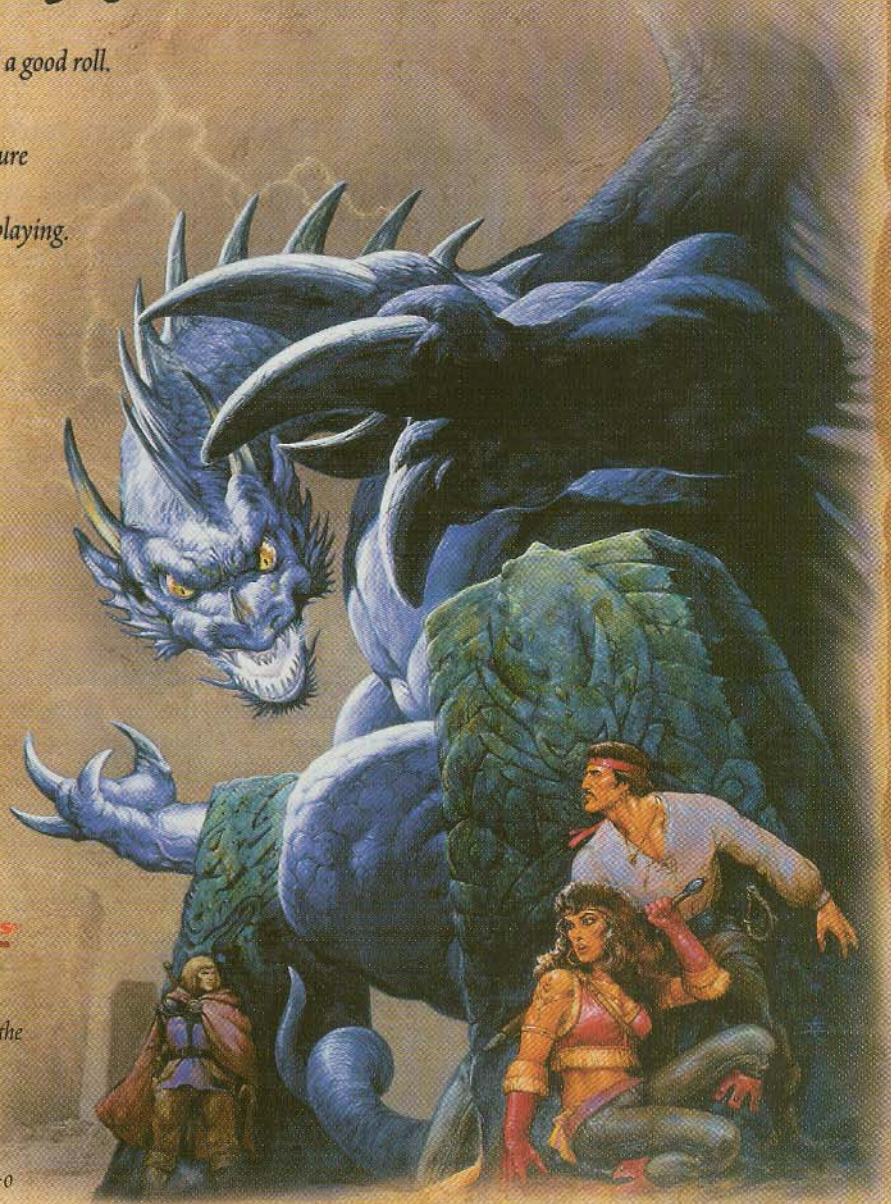

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Greendale MeadowField

A Lord of Ravens Bluff

Characters in the Living City™ campaign can eventually rise to positions of power and influence—even those who begin as poor merchants.

by
Robert Suriano and Jeff Quick

illustrated by
David Kooharian

THE LIVING CITY CAMPAIGN is a totally different take on convention roleplaying. At a typical convention, you receive a character, play for four hours, and then you're done. In the LIVING CITY campaign, you create your own character in the city of Ravens Bluff, then play him from one adventure to the next. Your character develops through tournaments and interactive events across the country. This unique campaign style combines aspects of tournament games with a home campaign feel. LIVING CITY players tell stories of adventure and camaraderie with gamers from across the U.S., Canada, and beyond.

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Greendale is played by Robert Suriano. Robert is a 12-year veteran of the RPGA and the AD&D® game. His family includes his wife, Terra; his black Labrador, Shadow; and his canary, Uri Bogdonovich.

9TH-LEVEL HALF-ELVEN BARD

STRENGTH	18
INTELLIGENCE	13
WISDOM	11
DEXTERITY	19
CONSTITUTION	10
CHARISMA	17
AC	–2
HIT POINTS	42
THAC0	13 (Adjusted)
ALIGNMENT	NG

Weapon Proficiencies: Long sword, rapier, long bow, dagger.

Nonweapon Proficiencies: Animal handling (10), juggling (18), local history (17), musical instruments (18), modern languages—Common and Elvish (13), flute (18), mandolin (18), reading/writing (14), singing (17), tumbling (19), weather sense (10).

Appearance: Greendale is a handsome male half-elf with golden hazel-eyes and blond hair. He dresses to impress the lords and nobles with whom he deals. He wears a black leather hat trimmed with golden lace and decorated with grand plumage, which he designed himself. He wears a blue velvet cloak over a shirt of the finest white silk. His boots are made from the best leather in the city, and his silver-and-gold-trimmed black pants are custom made by his personal tailor.

Background: Greendale Meadowfield is a frugal merchant who has made Ravens Bluff his home. He came from a poor clan within the valley of elves and sought a living as an adventurer traveling from town to town. After several years' experience singing, juggling, and otherwise entertaining the locals in their taverns, Greendale became a master bard and decided to move on to bigger and better things.

Greendale became bored with passing information from town to town, being hired to fend off the local bandits, and making little or no money for his efforts. The harder he worked, the poorer he became, so he vowed to do anything possible to become rich beyond his wildest dreams.

Greendale eventually came to Ravens Bluff, home of many famous adventurers, where he was hired immediately as a guard for a caravan of merchants. Finally, he could envision himself surrounded by what he deserved—the finer things in life. After a few adventures that included rescuing the Lord Mayor, fighting in the war, and fending off demon lords and liches, he saved enough gold and magic to open his own shop.

Greendale now owns four large buildings and the renowned Fort Carrague. His modest store is contained within a 50' × 120' building that is in good condition. After several of his rivals' stores shut their doors, he had a clear edge on the magical item trade. His stores abound with magical items.

Magical Items: *Bracers of defense AC 6, cloak of protection +2, ring of protection +2, long sword +2, dagger +3, dagger of armor piercing, bag of holding* (500 lbs.), *Dove's harp* (casts *cure light wounds* on all creatures in a 20' radius, once per day), *short sword +2* (sheds light in a 5' radius), *lenses of comprehending languages, ring of feather falling.*

Spellbook: *Color spray, magic missile, grease, shocking grasp; flaming sphere, invisibility, melf's acid arrow, mirror image, strength; fireball, fly, haste, lightning bolt, slow, water breathing.*

Roleplaying Notes: Greendale loves to entertain other adventurers who visit his store seeking useful items. He tells his tales of adventures and sings to visitors as they look around his establishment. Adventurers often come to his store with an unidentified item, and Greendale jumps at the chance to help research its identity and discover its powers.

Fine dining is one of his many pleasures, while shopping for expensive, well tailored garments is another. While flaunting his wealth to the local lords, he manages to share it with the commoners.

Convention Calendar

JANUARY

Weekend in Procampur

The Procampur expansion to the LIVING CITY™ Campaign now has its own convention. Events: Five different tournaments and an interactive event.

January 1–3 💻
Contact: Jay Fisher, 2690 Drew Street Apt. 1108,Clearwater, FL 33759. Email: jlorien@concentric.net. Website: http://www.concentric.net/~jlorien/conline/index.html.

January 8–10 FL
Orlando, FL. Contact: Leonard Dessert, 8031 Blue Trail, Orlando, FL 32822. Email: lady-n-thewizard@unforgettable.com.

January 9–10 CO
Contact: Gary S. Watkins, 10040 Lewis Ct., Westminster, CO 80021-3731. Email: Dragon0525@aol.com. Website: http://www.bengames.org/~whitet/bencon/.

January 9–10 ❊
Contact: Steve Campey, 267 B Hazel St., Waterloo, Ontario N2L 3P1, Canada. Email: camp6430@mach1.wlu.ca.

January 15–17 OR
Contact: Bob Ehmann at 125 S. E. Court, Suite 4, Pendleton, Oregon 97801 or Email: rehmann@ucinet.com.

January 15–17 OR
Contact: Goon Pattanumotana, 11527-2 Compass Point Drive North, San Diego, CA. Email: Gpattanumo@aol.com.

January 22–24 WI
Contact: Thomas Terrill at PO Box 353, MLH 1102, Milwaukee, WI 53202-0353. Email terrillt@execpc.com. Website: http://www.msoe.edu/st_orgs/gaming/convention.html.

January 23–24 CA
Contact: Dan Cooper, 3220 Watt Ave: Apt #9, Sacramento, CA 95821. Email CaptainHarlock@worldnet.att.net.

January 23–24 OH
Contact: Mark Middleton, 5232 Carifa Ct, Hilliard, OH 43026. Email mmiddlet@columbus.rr.com.

January 29–31 OK
Contact: Melissa Maurer, 1313 B George Avenue, Norman, OK 73072. Email: mmaurer@ou.edu.

FEBRUARY

Winter Fantasy

February 25-28 IL
Ramada Plaza Hotel O'Hare, Rosemont, Illinois. Guests: To be announced. Events: Games, seminars, demos and tournaments including: *Magic** Pro Tour Qualifier for New York and RPGA® Network events. Pre-registration: weekend badge $30, one day $12. Onsite: weekend badge $35, one day $15.Contact: Andon Unlimited, 129 N. Hamilton, Columbus, Ohio 43213. Email: Andon@aol.com. Pre-register online at www.andonunlimited.com

MARCH

Stellar Con 23

March 19-21 NC
Holiday Inn, Market Square, High Market, NC. Guests: Aaron Allston, Steven S. Long, Jack L. Chalker, Jody Lynn Nye, Sean Patrick Fannon. Registration: $15 before January 1, $20 between January 1 and March 1, $30 after. Contact: Stellar Con 23, Box 4 Elliot University Center, UNCG, Greensboro, NC 27412. Website: www.uncg.edu/student.groups/sf/stellarcon.htm.

Egyptian Campaign

March 26–28 IL
Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL. Events: RPGA AD&D, *Shadowrun**, *Battletech**, *Warhammer**, *Vampire**, *Diplomacy**, *Axis & allies**, *Magic**, *Star Fleet Battles**, *Car Wars**, and many other board, miniature, card, and roleplaying games. Contact: Egyptian Campaign 1999, % SIUC Strategic Games Society, Office of Student Development, Carbondale, IL 62901-4425. Email: ecgamecon@aol.com. Website: www.siu.edu/~gamesoc.

Convention Calendar Policies

This column is a service to our readers worldwide. Anyone may place a free listing for a game convention here, but the following guidelines must be observed.

In order to ensure that all convention listings contain accurate and timely information, all material should be either typed double-spaced or printed legibly on standard manuscript paper. The contents of each listing must be short and succinct.

The information given in the listing must include the following, in this order:

1. Convention title and dates held
2. Site and location
3. Guests of honor (if applicable)
4. Special events offered
5. Registration fees or attendance requirements, and,
6. Address(es) where additional information and confirmation can be obtained.

Convention flyers, newsletters, and other mass-mailed announcements will not be considered for use in this column; we prefer to see a cover letter with the announcement as well. No call-in listings are accepted. Unless stated otherwise, all dollar values given for U.S. and Canadian conventions are in U.S. currency.

Warning: We are not responsible for incorrect information sent to us by convention staff members. Please check your convention listing carefully! Accurate information is your responsibility.

Copy deadlines are the first Monday of each month, four months prior to the on sale date of an issue. Thus, the copy deadline for the December issue is the first Monday of September. Announcements for all conventions must be mailed to: "Conventions," *DRAGON® Magazine*, 1801 Lind Avenue S.W., Renton, WA, 98055, U.S.A.

If a convention listing must be changed because the convention has been cancelled, the dates have changed, or incorrect information has been printed, please contact us immediately. Most questions or changes should be directed to the magazine editors at (425) 254-2262 (U.S.A.).

Important: *DRAGON Magazine* does not publish phone numbers for conventions. Be certain that any address you send us is complete and correct.

To ensure that your convention listing makes it into our files, enclose a self-addressed stamped postcard with your first convention notice; we will return the card to show that it was received. You also might send a second notice one week after mailing the first. Mail your listing as early as possible, and always keep us informed of any changes. Please do not send convention notices by fax, as this method has not proven reliable.

❖ Australian convention
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💻 Online convention

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THE ECOLOGY OF THE CYCLOPSKIN

Brokk's Lucky Day

All Brokk had to do was keep his eye on the slaves. How hard could it be?

by
Johnathan M. Richards

illustrated by
Matt Mitchell

AS USUAL, BROKK WOKE TO THE BITING OF FLEAS.

He sat up in the filthy nest of uncured hides that comprised his bed, yawning. Scratching the side of his belly with one hand, he made a quick darting motion into his matted hair with the other, snatching at one of the irk some fleas that plagued his existence.

As usual, the flea avoided his grasp.

Brokk spent the next few minutes, as was his custom, groping through the thick, black hair that framed his head,[1] hunting for pests. The fleas, as was their custom, avoided his probings, but he did manage to catch a few lice. These he popped into his mouth as a snack, crunching absently as he rose to face the day.

The others were stirring as well. Gulokk, the leader, rolled the boulder from the cave entrance, the morning sunlight falling over his well-muscled arms. As the strongest male, he was the leader of the cyclopskin band, so the duty fell to them—mostly as a reminder to the other males in the band as to just why *he* was the leader, not them. Brugar and Turogg, weapons in hand, stood ready to defend the cave should anything be waiting to pounce upon them as the boulder was rolled away.[2] Even Old Gork, wounded in the leg from a bad fall some fifteen winters ago, had a part in the morning ritual: he stumbled over to the women and kicked them awake with his twisted foot.[3]

---

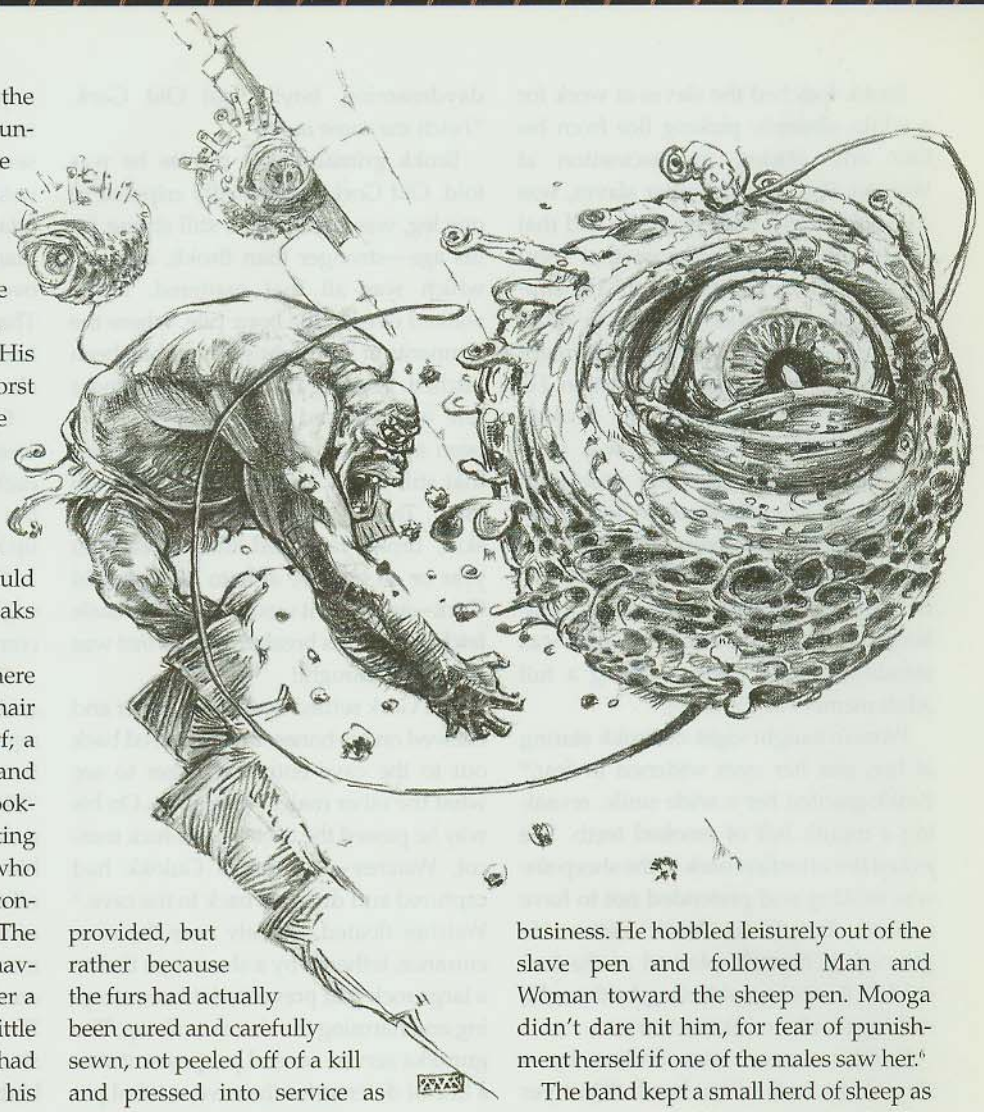
1. Cyclopskin hair is long, shaggy, and unkempt, a haven for lice, ticks, and fleas. Usually black, it can also be a dull, deep blue. Grooming is uncommon; usually a cyclopskin just tucks his hair behind his ears to keep it out of the way.

Members of both sexes lose their hair at an early age. By the time a cyclopskin enters adult society he's already thinning on top, if he doesn't already have a full-fledged bald spot. By age twenty-five, most cyclopskin are completely bald. They don't mind the lack of hair, since it keeps the vermin at bay.

In addition, cyclopskin don't grow facial hair, so beards and mustaches are unknown among the race.

2. Many creatures prey upon cyclopskin: tigers, wyverns, giants, and trolls, to name a few. As most cyclopskin bands live in permanent lairs, their locations are often known to the larger predators in the area. Mountain dwarves even go out of their way to attack cyclopskin, receiving the dwarven bonus against giants when doing so. For this reason, cyclopskin block their cave entrances with boulders or a stout wooden gate when they retire for the night. Cyclopskin caves always have but a single entrance; any naturally occurring additional entrances are sealed off with boulders and large stone slabs by the cyclopskin before they inhabit it.

3. Cyclopskin society is completely male-dominated and led by the strongest male. The weaker males follow his lead only through fear. Females and children are in turn subservient to the males and occupy the lowest niches of cyclopskin society. Cyclopskin have nothing but disregard for those weaker than themselves, even members of their own tribes or clans. Thus, the leader is brutal to everyone; the weaker males obey the leader but are in turn brutish to their mates and children. Cyclopskin children, if they're lucky, can vent their frustration on the clan's slaves. If the clan has no slaves, they just bide their time in silence until they are big enough to fight back successfully. Most cyclopskin clan leaders are killed not by one of the many creatures that habitually prey upon cyclopskin but rather by another male of their own clan that has had enough of subservience and has decided that it's time he gets to be the boss.



A cold, strong wind blew into the cave entrance. It brought in fresh, mountain air, contrasting sharply with the stenches in the cave: the smells of the slaves and sheep penned in the back, the dung and offal strewn about all parts of the floor, and above all, the unwashed bodies of eight cyclopskin.

The fresh air felt good to Brokk. His thick skin protected him from the worst of the low temperatures found in the mountain environment.[4] He wore only a ragged loincloth of moldering cave bear skin and scraps of the same skin tied around his feet with leather cords. Thus garbed, he could walk among the snow-covered peaks with little discomfort.

The slaves were not so lucky. There were three: a human male with gray hair covering his lower face like a dwarf; a human female, light in complexion and nervous in mannerisms, constantly looking about her with fearful, darting glances; and a pointy-eared elf male who said little but whose face betrayed constant resentment toward his masters. The elf had but one good foot, the other having been chopped off by Gulokk after a failed escape attempt—now he had little more than a heel where his right foot had been. The loss of his foot had soured his attitude, and he spent his days moping about the unfairness of his lot in life. The slaves no doubt had names they used among themselves, but to the cyclopskin they were simply "Man," "Woman," and "Elf," or else "Slave" if it didn't matter which one was being called.

The three of them huddled together for warmth in the corner of their pen, shivering in their thin garments. When they had first been captured half a year ago, they had each worn fine fur cloaks. Those cloaks now graced Gulokk's muscular frame, not for the warmth they provided, but rather because the furs had actually been cured and carefully sewn, not peeled off of a kill and pressed into service as clothing immediately afterward.

Mooga, belly swollen in late pregnancy and in a foul mood because of it,[5] opened the slave pen and growled at the slaves to get out. Woman jumped up at once and complied, fearing retribution; Man stumbled up wearily on old, stiff bones but followed Woman out of the pen. Elf, as usual, sat where he was and stared insolently at Mooga, daring her to come get him. She growled again; he stayed put. She took a step into the pen and he stood up slowly, stretching, as if just now deciding to get about the day's business. He hobbled leisurely out of the slave pen and followed Man and Woman toward the sheep pen. Mooga didn't dare hit him, for fear of punishment herself if one of the males saw her.[6]

The band kept a small herd of sheep as an easy source of food. Not only did the sheep provide wool for the clan, but they were also a backup source of food when hunting was slim—or when the cyclopskin just didn't feel like exerting the effort necessary for hunting. With the sheep, meat and milk (and now cheese, thanks to the skills of Woman) were always available. The animals were kept in a separate pen to prevent one of the slaves from killing and feasting on a sheep in the middle of the night—it wouldn't be hard to imagine them doing so, since the slaves were fed so little.

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4. A cyclopskin's tough hide grants him a natural AC of 3. Because their thick skins provide them such ample protection, cyclopskin never wear armor and seldom carry shields.

5. Cyclopskin life expectancy being somewhat short (reaching the ripe old age of fifty is quite an accomplishment), cyclopskin women are kept pregnant as much as possible. This brings more clan members into the world, replenishing the ones who are killed in raids against enemies and power struggles within the clan. Due to the poor treatment of the pregnant mothers and the unsanitary conditions of cyclopskin dwellings, miscarriages are frequent, and infant mortality ranges from 10–20%.

A female cyclopskin has little to look forward to in life. Her gender puts her at the bottom of cyclopskin society straight from birth. Almost immediately after puberty, she becomes little more than a brood mare, delivering baby after baby and still being treated as little more than a slave herself. Worse, her sons eventually grow up to become adult males who treat her as badly as the others. Eventually, she will no longer be of childbearing age—at which point she is unceremoniously banished from the tribe to survive on her own (rather than be allowed to drain the tribe's resources).

6. Technically, cyclopskin females are higher in rank than are slaves in cyclopskin society. However, cyclopskin value their slaves highly, since a slave can be forced to do a great deal of work that the cyclopskin would otherwise have to do for themselves. A slave's value grows higher the fewer their number: if a tribe owns twenty slaves, no one's going to mind a female abusing a slave or two. However, if there's only a small handful, the females had better keep their hands off the slaves. As might be expected, this only leads to further resentment on the part of the females.

Brokk watched the slaves at work for a while, absently picking lice from his hair and staring in fascination at Woman. She, like the other slaves, was somewhat ugly, with two eyes and that preposterously skinny nose that went all the way to her forehead.[7] He supposed she was good-looking to other members of her race, but try as he might Brokk just couldn't see the attraction. He compared her to Gruba, the favored female of the tribe.[8] Gruba was truly beautiful: the classic, wide nose with gaping nostrils, the hairless scalp that glinted in the sun. Even Little Aga was better looking than Woman, and she was only three, still a few years from adulthood (unlike Brokk, who at age nine was standing on the brink of being a full adult member of the tribe).[9]

Woman caught sight of Brokk staring at her, and her eyes widened in fear.[10] Brokk granted her a wide smile, revealing a mouth full of crooked teeth. She jerked her attention back to the sheep she was milking and pretended not to have noticed. But Brokk knew better. He grinned to himself, pleased at the fear she felt. It was a good feeling, he thought, making smaller creatures fear you.

Brokk's reverie was broken by a slap to the back of his head. "Quit yer daydreaming, boy!" spat Old Gork. "Fetch me some meat!"

Brokk grimaced but did as he was told. Old Gork, while badly crippled in one leg, was nonetheless still strong for his age—stronger than Brokk, anyway, which was all that mattered. Brokk walked over to the bone pile, where the remnants of last night's dinner had been pitched. Digging through it, he found a few well-gnawed bones (the rats had been at it again last night, he noticed) that still had a few chunks of meat on them. Tossing them to the old cyclopskin, Brokk reckoned that in another year or so he'd be able to take on Old Gork—and then it would be the old male fetching him his breakfast. Now *that* was a pleasant thought!

Old Gork settled down in a corner and chewed on his bones. Brokk moved back out to the cave entrance, eager to see what the other males were up to. On his way he passed the tribe's good-luck mascot, Watcher—a gurokka Gulokk had captured and dragged back to the cave.[11] Watcher floated serenely near the cave entrance, tethered by a short rope tied to a large rock that prevented it from straying and harming the slaves or sheep. The gurokka served several purposes: it was a line of defense for the cave, a tribal pet requiring little upkeep, and a constant reminder of the days when the tribe had served a beholder-god, Jzemnix. Fortunately, the adventuring band that attacked the tribe and their god had managed to slay Jzemnix before being overcome themselves by the cyclopskin. That had been a truly lucky day: the tribe had not only gotten rid of their god but also gained their three slaves!

Gulokk and Brugar were gathering weapons, preparing for a hunt. They each selected three sturdy spears from the tribe's stock; each warrior grabbed up his lucky bardiche as well.[12]

"I will go with you," offered Brokk, eager as always to be accepted into the company of the adults.

"You will stay here with the females and the slaves," countered Gulokk, equally eager to keep irritating children from his presence whenever possible. "Make yourself useful, though, and grab a skin of kragh."[13] Brokk did as he was bid and watched the two males saunter off down the mountain. "I will guard the cave!" he called to the leader; Gulokk merely waved his hand as if swatting an annoying fly and continued walking. Pride stung, Brokk grabbed a spear and stood at the cave's entrance, trying his best to look fierce.

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7. Because their single eye is directly above their nose, cyclopskin do not have "bridges" to their noses. Instead, a cyclopskin's nose is broad and flat, with wide nostrils. The oversized nostrils allow for a greater air intake in the higher altitudes, where many mountain-dwelling cyclopskin lair.

8. "Favored female" status is often not based upon physical attractiveness, but rather on storytelling ability. In cyclopskin society, the females are the keepers of the spoken history of the tribe (cyclopskin do not have a written language). They actually must keep track of two separate histories: the "official" history, in which all benefits are attributed to the current tribal leader (the strongest male), and the "real" history, which by necessity is spoken of only among the females. As might be expected, the "official" history changes each time a new male takes over leadership of the tribe. At that time, a new "favored female" may be chosen, based upon which female can present the new leader with the most impressively revised "official" history (starring himself, of course).

9. Cyclopskin mature quickly—another evolutionary adaptation to counter their often short life spans. A cyclopskin reaches adulthood by nine or ten and has an average life span of 35 to 40 years.

10. Cyclopskin occasionally breed with members of other humanoid species. Most unions do not result in offspring, with a the few exceptions. Cyclopskin/orc crossbreeding results in larger, one-eyed orcs. As their single eye is reminiscent of the one-eyed orcish god Gruumsh, these half-breed orcs often become tribal shamans or witch doctors.

Unions between cyclopskin and ettins result in an ettin-sized, two-headed creature with a single eye on each head. (See the "biclops" entry by Spike Y. Jones in *Dragon Magazine* #172.) Fortunately, humans and demihumans cannot breed with cyclopskin.

11. Unlike most other mammals, cyclopskin are immune to the rhizomes produced by gas spores ("gurokka" in the cyclopskin language) and can therefore touch them without harm. As a result, cyclopskin often keep gas spores as "pets" or "lucky guardians" in their caves. They like the fact that gas spores have a single large eye. (Cyclopskin ignore the smaller, eyelike organs on the ends of the rhizome growths.) In fact, cyclopskin are preternaturally disposed toward liking beholders and ropers for the same reason, but unfortunately they have no natural resistance to the attacks of these creatures. (Some beholders make use of cyclopskin minions; these beholders are generally believed to be gods by the cyclopskin tribes they dominate.)

Cyclopskin bands that domesticate sheep or goats, or those with mammalian slaves (such as humans and demihumans) must take precautions to keep them safe from their gurokka. This is usually done by tethering the gas spore in place or putting it in a cage. Being well aware of the gas spore's explosive power, cyclopskin occasionally use gas spores as last-ditch weapons in defense of their cave, throwing the creatures at invading dragons or wyverns looking for a quick cyclopskin meal.

12. Cyclopskin prefer simple weapons—clubs, spears, slings, and bardiches. The clubs can be either standard size or, more commonly, great clubs (see *The Complete Guide to Humanoids*, page 112, for details). The cyclopskin bardiche is a stone axe head mounted on a 5' wooden shaft. Cyclopskin have simple battle tactics: they see a foe and immediately close to fight using clubs or bardiches. The spears and oversized slings (which inflict 1–6 hp damage) are used only if the enemy is out of range, and also for the rare occasions cyclopskin go out to hunt.

Occasionally, cyclopskin fill their slings with a handful of small rocks and pebbles. Such "buckshot" spreads over a larger area, negating the –2 penalty on missile attack rolls by dint of having a better chance of hitting their target with at least one of the stones. A natural 20 inflicts 2d6 + 4 hp damage as a result of the target being hit more than once. On the down side, it takes a full round to reload a sling with such "buckshot."

Because of their monocular vision and resultant lack of depth perception, cyclopskin strike at –2 to hit (but not to damage) with most missile weapons. For this reason, they put little stock in ownership of missile weapons; slings and spears are community property, to be used by any tribe member requiring them. Melee weapons, on the other hand, are more reliable, inflicting greater damage to the cyclopskin's enemies (owing in no small part to the brutes' enormous Strength, which adds +4 to all melee weapon damage)—thus, nobody had better mess with a cyclopskin's club or bardiche. These weapons are private property, and taking another's melee weapon is grounds for a fight, often to the death.

Cyclopskin are more than willing to make use of captured weapons, but as metalsmithing is unknown to them, they do not manufacture swords, daggers, or the like.

13. Kragh is an alcoholic beverage, much like the koumiss, or fermented mare's milk, enjoyed by the Mongols of the Asian steppes. Kragh is made from either goat's or sheep's milk.

As much as pretending to be a fearsome sentry assuaged the young cyclopskin's pride, it got boring rather quickly. Time passed; he amused himself by repeatedly throwing his spear at a tree, by gathering up pebbles and seeing how far he could throw them down the mountainside, by watching the females carve spearheads out of stone,[14] and by picking berries from the bushes that grew near the cave. Once a squirrel came near; Brokk threw the spear but came nowhere close to hitting it. The animal scampered off to safety.

Out of ways to amuse himself, Brokk approached Gruba and asked for a story. Always eager to speak the tribe's history, Gruba gladly complied.

"I tell the tale of the wicked troll," intoned Gruba. The other females stopped their carving and paid attention, listening not only to the favored female's words but to her storytelling technique as well.

"This was back in the days of the beholder-god Jzemnix, before Gulokk tired of his demands upon us and slew him. There were many trolls in these mountains in those days, and they often preyed upon us as if we were sheep!" This last word brought a gasp among the listeners, Brokk included. Imagine, he thought, a creature able to bring down a powerful cyclopskin as easily as we slay a sheep! The mind staggered.

"In exchange for our worship, Jzemnix was a protector to our people. He kept the trolls and the dragons, the tigers and the wyverns at bay. Or ..." Gruba said, looking around at each member of her audience, "he was supposed to. But Jzemnix was a bad god! While he wandered the mountains in search of other gods, a fierce troll snuck up on our tribe. Great were its claws! Wicked were its teeth! Mighty was its hunger!

"The troll struck with a wild fury. Many warriors met its attack, but with every swipe of the monster's claws, another cyclopskin fell dead.

"Finally, Gulokk approached the troll. He hefted his lucky bardiche in his mighty hands, and the troll knew fear! Jzemnix knew fear too, for he knew that Gulokk would kill the troll and show us all that we did not need a useless god! So Jzemnix raced to the scene, and the troll ran away. But before it did, it snatched up a dead warrior in each of its wicked claws—and that night, the sounds of the creature feasting, tearing flesh and snapping bones, could be heard for many miles."

Her story finished, Gruba returned to the spearhead she was carving. Reluctantly, the other females followed suit. Brokk, bored again, looked for something else to do.

Fortunately, the sheep were being herded out of the cave to graze. Turogg, a male only a few years older than Brokk, gave him the choice of watching the sheep or the slaves. Thinking it over, Brokk chose the slaves. Sheep were boring. So were slaves, for the most part, but at least the young cyclopskin could lord over the slaves—sheep were never properly intimidated. Turogg gathered up a spear and his lucky club and led the sheep higher up the mountain where the good grazing was to be found.

That left only Old Gork, the three females, and the slaves with Brokk. He gathered up the slave restraints—lengths of leather cord used to hobble them at the ankles to prevent them from fleeing—from a pile on the floor and beckoned them over. Woman, usually eager to comply with the cyclopskin's demands, cringed behind Man and Elf as they ambled over. She shivered as

14. While females are not permitted to use weapons, they are usually in charge of making them. The males are too lazy to do it themselves, and they don't wish to delegate the task to slaves. (Disgruntled slaves and hand weapons are never a good mix.) The cyclopskin females become quite good at fashioning spearheads and axe heads, whittling down wooden shafts for spears and bardiches, and sewing together leather slings. The males reserve club production for themselves, as this usually entails nothing more than finding a sturdy tree limb.

Brokk tied her ankles, fearful at the nearness of the brute. Brokk grinned smugly at her obvious fear.

Once the three slaves had been hobbled, Brokk gave them each a crudely made basket and sent them waddling down the mountainside with a prod of his spear. Old Gork looked up from the cave interior, grunted once, and returned to his rat-hunting among the bone-piles, ever searching for fresh meat.

The trip down the mountainside was boring, as expected. The slaves were listless, so firmly entrenched in their servitude it seemed pointless to have to guard them. Brokk almost wished they'd try to escape or something, so he could put a stop to it. That would impress the adults, singlehandedly quelling a slave revolt!

But no such luck. The closest thing Brokk got to a slave revolt was when he caught Elf grumbling aloud to the others. "Shuddup up there!" bellowed the cyclopskin,[15] whacking Elf on the side of the head with his spear and causing him to fall to the ground. The other two slaves helped him back up and then resumed their trek in glowering silence.

It was midafternoon by the time Brokk's slaves (for that was how he thought of them, without others of his kind around) had filled the baskets with sufficient foodstuffs—mushrooms and tubers, mostly, with some wild berries and scraggly weeds thrown in as well.[16] He was leading them back up the mountain and was finally within sight of the cave, disgusted with the pathetically slow progress of the maimed elf, when he heard shouts coming from above. It was Turogg's voice, roaring a battle challenge. There was also the bleating of frightened sheep.

Brokk was in a quandary. There was a battle up ahead—a chance to fight! And yet, if he left the slaves, they might escape. But a battle! Brokk twisted his head back and forth, looking first at his hobbled charges and then back up the mountain, at the sounds of combat. What to do? What to do?

Finally, he came upon a solution. Grabbing Man's head in one hand and Elf's in the other, he smacked their heads together—clunk! Both slumped unconscious to the ground. Woman shrieked and went to Man's aid. "Stay there," warned Brokk, then grabbed his spear and raced up the mountainside, shouting for Gork.

Old Gork poked his head out of the cave to see what all the commotion was about. "The slaves," panted Brokk, pointing down the mountainside. "See to the slaves!" Then he was past the cave, racing to the pasture lands above. Old Gork grunted, grabbed up a spear, and limped down to find the slaves. He grumbled to himself as he walked.

Brokk, out of breath, followed the sounds of frightened sheep and popped up onto a flat stretch of ground. There he saw the green, hunched back of an enormous troll—just like from Gruba's story! The powerful creature had one arm raised above its misshapen head, and Turogg dangled in its grasp. The cyclopskin's feet kicked feebly in the air, his hands desperately trying to pull the troll's gnarled green hand away from his windpipe. Turogg's face was turning blue, his single eye bulging as if about to pop.[17]

The troll's back was to Brokk. Stopping only long enough to tighten his grip on the spear, Brokk charged the fearsome creature. The stone tip of the spear made a pleasant tearing sound as it ripped through the troll's back. Unfortunately, it plunged right through the vile creature's body and impaled Turogg through the belly as well.

The troll dropped Turogg and spun around to face this new threat. Of course, the weight of the falling cyclopskin, still pinned to the spear that pierced the troll's body, threw the troll off balance, and it landed awkwardly atop its one-eyed prey. Brokk, now weaponless, found his tribe-mate's lucky club lying in the grass a few feet away. Turogg did not look like he'd be offering any complaints, so Brokk grabbed up the weapon and brought it down onto the troll's head. There was a satisfying thunk as he caved in the creature's skull, but that didn't stop the hideous troll's movement. Half of its head caved in, it still wriggled in an attempt to get free of the spear. Brokk brought the club down again, and again, and again, crushing the troll to a bloody pulp. Turogg's body didn't fare much better. Then again, he was already dead.

Thoroughly winded, Brokk sat down to catch his breath. The sheep had spread out in all directions, but now that the excitement was over, they settled down and returned to their grazing. Brokk thought about trying to gather them together but didn't have the energy.

Then, several minutes after Brokk had killed the troll, it started moving again, struggling to get up. Brokk picked up Turogg's club and bashed the creature until it stopped moving. He kept a wary eye on it, and sure enough, it started moving again a few minutes later. Brokk kept up the routine, killing the troll over and over again every few minutes, scaring the sheep, until finally, some time later, Gulokk and Brugar appeared.

"What the—?" sputtered Gulokk, amazed at the sight of the dead troll. He looked at Brokk with admiration clearly showing in his eye. "My son," he said. "My son, the warrior!"[18] Brokk felt his chest swell with pride.

Gulokk quickly took control over the situation. He and Brugar pulled the spear out of the battered troll's body, dragged it off of Turogg's stiffening corpse, and stretched it out on the grass. With a mighty swing of his bardiche, Gulokk severed the troll's head and sent Brokk scampering after it. Brugar, meanwhile, did the same with the troll's hands. Then, gathering up the severed appendages, Gulokk pitched them off the side of the mountain in three different directions to prevent them from reat-

15. Cyclopskin speak the common language of giants among themselves, although some individuals may also learn to speak an additional language as well: usually the Common tongue or either the hill giant or ogre dialect.

16. While cyclopskin prefer a diet of meat—any meat—they can live off of nearly any animal or plant diet. During the harsh mountain winters, cyclopskin have learned not to be particular about what they eat, so long as they eat.

17. A cyclopskin's eye tends to bug out somewhat anyway. The position of its eye grants the creature a wide range of vision, nearly 180 degrees in front of it. Cyclopskin rarely have vision trouble (such as nearsightedness or farsightedness); this is probably an evolutionary adaptation: with only one eye, it's important that the cyclopskin retains strong vision.

taching to the rest of the troll's body, as they were wont to do.

Brokk helped drag the troll back to the cave. "Old Gork!" cried out Gulokk. "We have brought you fresh meat!" The females came forward at the call, but Gulokk sent them up the mountain to watch over the sheep. "This is a warrior's meal!" he cried out to them. "You will feast later, with the slaves! Gork, where are you? My fine son Brokk has killed a troll!" Gulokk searched the cave in all directions: Old Gork was not to be seen. "Where is he?" he asked.

"I sent him down to look after the slaves," ventured Brokk.

"Old Gork tending slaves?" roared Gulokk. He slapped Brokk on the side of his head. "Fool! Idiot!"

"But they were hobbled ..." began Brokk.

"Pah!" spat the leader. "Even hobbled, they can outdistance Old Gork! Come, quickly!" And he raced out of the cave, Brugar and Brokk on his heels.

It was too late. Gulokk and the others came upon Old Gork pushing Elf up the mountain with his spear. "Where are the other slaves?" demanded Gulokk.

Old Gork snorted in contempt and pointed down the mountain with his thumb. "They ran. You can go after them if you like, but I'm too old. Caught this one, though."

"I did not try to flee!" sputtered the elf. "The others ran when the young cyclops[19] left us, but I didn't! I— I tried to stop them!"

Gulokk pointed down at the slave's feet. "Your bonds are gone," he pointed out, smacking Elf in the side of the head with his fist. The slave crumpled over. "Drag him back to the pen," said Gulokk. Then, looking directly at Brokk, he said, "This is your fault! Find those slaves at once! Brugar, go with the idiot!" The two cyclopskin rushed off. As he raced down the mountainside, Brokk realized he had fallen from the leader's prized son to the tribal idiot. Such were the ways of luck, he decided.[20]

That night, Brokk and Brugar returned to the cave empty-handed. The two

18. Since most cyclopskin don't keep regular mates (breeding with whoever's available in the tribe), questions of paternity are seldom answered accurately. The tribal leader usually takes credit for being the father of particularly strong warriors, as obviously they could inherit such strength only from him. Of course, once the leader is killed and a new one takes his place, the new leader takes credit for being the "true" father of the powerful young males of the tribe. Cyclopskin are thus generally never aware of their true fathers.

19. Many people don't differentiate between true Cyclopes and their smaller cousins. Whereas the cyclopskin stand only 7' tall, a cyclops is normally about 20' tall, able to hurl boulders at a range of 150' like true giants (causing 4–10 hp damage, not 410 as incorrectly printed in the *Monstrous Manual*™ book, page 133). The name "Cyclops" means "wheel-eyed," named because their eyes are said to be as big and round as wagon wheels.

20. Most cyclopskin do not bother worshipping gods. The main exception to this rule is when a band of cyclopskin serves as a beholder's minions—then, they revere the beholder as their all-powerful god. After all, a beholder as a god makes perfect sense to them: the creature is very powerful, has one big eye in the center of its head (like them), and can actually be seen (and thus no effort is required to believe in the beholder's existence—this doesn't hold true for other, less visible gods).

Instead of a god, cyclopskin fervently believe in luck as a powerful force of nature that affects every aspect of their lives. If they have a successful hunt, luck was with them that day. If their favorite weapon is dropped down a crevice and lost, it is an unlucky day. A cyclopskin's change in fortune is blamed on others whenever possible; a cyclopskin "scapegoat" is chosen as the cause for the individual's misfortune, and a fight usually ensues. If the scapegoat loses, it is believed by the winner that his luck will now change for the better. If the scapegoat wins, then he has proven that he wasn't responsible for the bad luck, and the challenger must find another cyclopskin to blame for his misfortune. Such luck-fights are limited to the males, since how could a lowly female have any effect on a male's luck?

Since most cyclopskin bands do not worship gods, they do not have a shaman or witch doctor among them. In fact, magic is seen as a powerful and unnatural force to be feared and destroyed whenever possible. A band of cyclopskin attacking a party of adventurers always targets wizards and priests first—warriors they understand, but you never know when some robed human will start throwing *fireballs* at you simply by pointing a little stick in your direction. Magical items known as such are usually discarded by cyclopskin in an attempt to ward of their "unlucky" properties. On the other hand, cyclopskin often wield magical swords or other weapons, simply because of their ignorance of

slaves were gone, vanished without a trace.[21] Brokk slumped into the cave, ready for a night of abuse from the tribal leader.

Surprisingly, Gulokk's mood had mellowed during their absence—no doubt a result of the abundant feast of troll-meat. As Brokk tore a piece off of the green-fleshed troll corpse, he was amazed as the missing piece started growing back.

"Great, huh?" asked Old Gork as he settled down beside Brokk. "You did good, boy."

"But the slaves ..." began Brokk, tears starting to well unbidden in the corners of his eye.[22] He blinked them back, not wishing to appear foolish, even before Old Gork.

"Pah!" spat the elder cyclopskin. "Who needs 'em? Now that we got a troll for food, there's less work for a slave to do! We don't need them to gather as much food when we got all the meat we'll ever need right here!" Old Gork cackled in delight. "Besides, we still got us a slave, all right. He'll do plenty for now. And maybe, if we're lucky, someday we'll get more!"

Later that night, back in his bed of mismatched hides, Brokk thought back on the day's events. He had killed a troll. That was lucky. He had also killed Turogg and allowed two slaves to escape. That was unlucky. He had gained Turogg's lucky club, though; that was lucky. He had become an adult in the eyes of the tribe, too: definitely lucky. Still, he'd miss Woman, even though she was so ugly. Unlucky. But then, he did have a belly full of troll flesh, and was more comfortably full than he had been in a long time.

Oh well, thought Brokk. All in all, a lucky day. He rolled over, scratched at a few pestering fleas, and was soon asleep.

Johnathan M. Richards has amassed quite a collection of lead figures. He refuses to paint them on the grounds that, unpainted, they're fine statuary. Painted, they're toys.

their magical properties. If the *long sword* +2 he took from a slain adventurer allows a cyclopskin to hit his enemies in combat more often than usual, surely that's because of the cyclopskin's skill, or because the weapon is "lucky," not because of any inherent magical power in the sword.

21. Cyclopskin are universally recognized as pathetic hunters and even worse trackers. Evading a cyclopskin in the wild is not difficult at all. On the other hand, tracking one is almost embarrassingly easy, as they make no attempts to hide their trails or cover their tracks merely plod along in their bumbling way. Even those without the tracking proficiency can follow a cyclopskin's trail one time out of three; those with the tracking ability gain a +4 bonus to their attempts when following cyclopskin. As a noted ranger once put it, when it comes to a cyclopskin's knowledge of tracking skills, the word that best describes them is "clueless."

22. Cyclopskin have two tear ducts, one at each side of their single eye. Since they have just the one eye, evolution has made it easier for them to keep it free of grit and dust.

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Dragon Mirth™

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"The office computer is down for repairs, but I was able to get us a loaner 'til we get it back."

By Aaron Williams

"... and all around was void. Then the Almighty Ranga rolled a natural 20. And there was light!"

By Joe Pillsbury

By Richard Tomasic

"No, you can't use the bathroom."

By Dwayne Meyer

Knights of the Dinner Table

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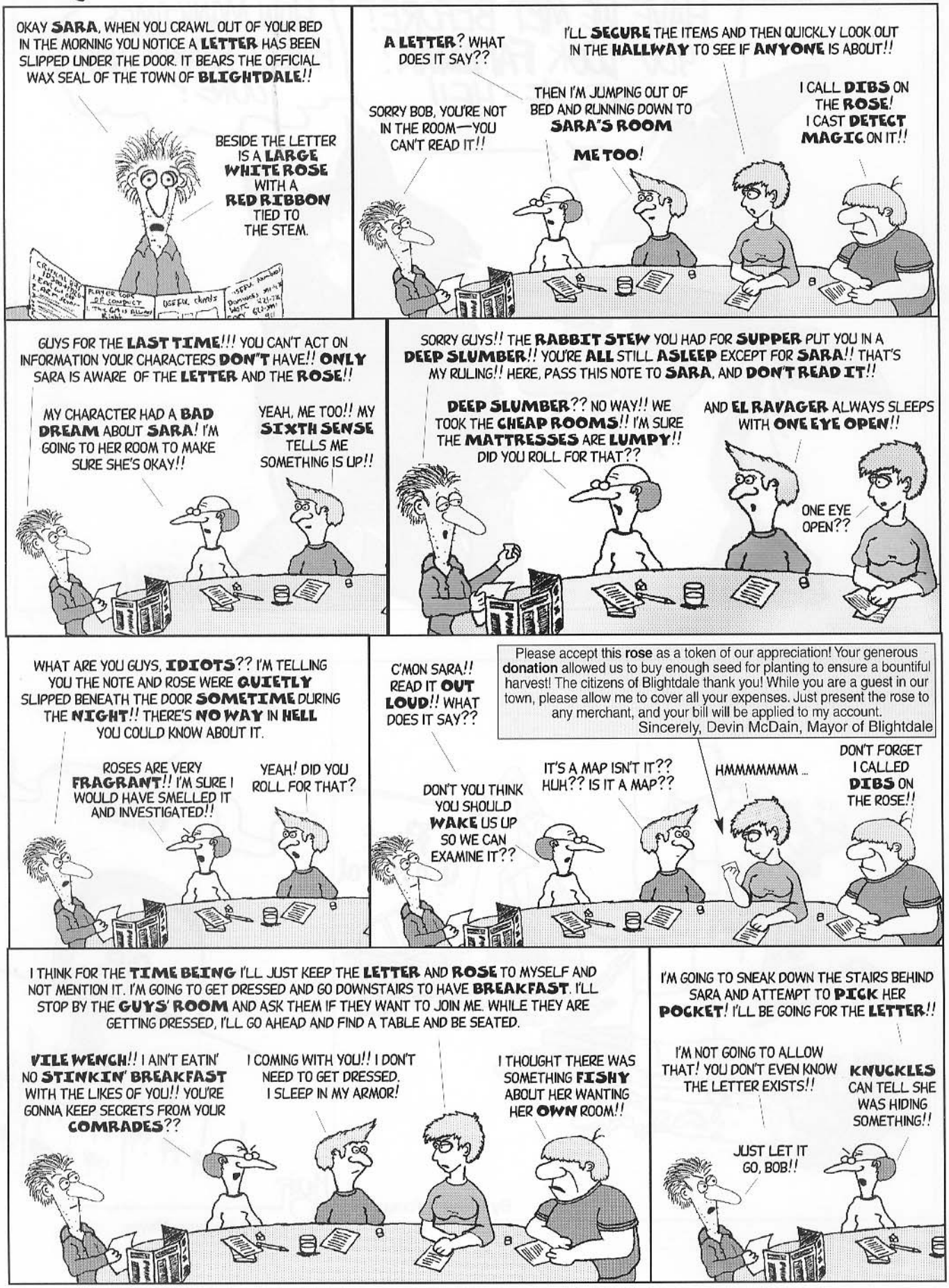

OKAY SARA, WHEN YOU CRAWL OUT OF YOUR BED IN THE MORNING YOU NOTICE A LETTER HAS BEEN SLIPPED UNDER THE DOOR. IT BEARS THE OFFICIAL WAX SEAL OF THE TOWN OF BLIGHTDALE!!
BESIDE THE LETTER IS A LARGE WHITE ROSE WITH A RED RIBBON TIED TO THE STEM.
A LETTER? WHAT DOES IT SAY??
SORRY BOB, YOU'RE NOT IN THE ROOM—YOU CAN'T READ IT!!
THEN I'M JUMPING OUT OF BED AND RUNNING DOWN TO SARA'S ROOM
ME TOO!
I'LL SECURE THE ITEMS AND THEN QUICKLY LOOK OUT IN THE HALLWAY TO SEE IF ANYONE IS ABOUT!!
I CALL DIBS ON THE ROSE! I CAST DETECT MAGIC ON IT!!
GUYS FOR THE LAST TIME!!! YOU CAN'T ACT ON INFORMATION YOUR CHARACTERS DON'T HAVE!! ONLY SARA IS AWARE OF THE LETTER AND THE ROSE!!
MY CHARACTER HAD A BAD DREAM ABOUT SARA! I'M GOING TO HER ROOM TO MAKE SURE SHE'S OKAY!!
YEAH, ME TOO!! MY SIXTH SENSE TELLS ME SOMETHING IS UP!!
SORRY GUYS!! THE RABBIT STEW YOU HAD FOR SUPPER PUT YOU IN A DEEP SLUMBER!! YOU'RE ALL STILL ASLEEP EXCEPT FOR SARA!! THAT'S MY RULING!! HERE, PASS THIS NOTE TO SARA, AND DON'T READ IT!!
DEEP SLUMBER?? NO WAY!! WE TOOK THE CHEAP ROOMS!! I'M SURE THE MATTRESSES ARE LUMPY!! DID YOU ROLL FOR THAT??
AND EL RAVAGER ALWAYS SLEEPS WITH ONE EYE OPEN!!
ONE EYE OPEN??
WHAT ARE YOU GUYS, IDIOTS?? I'M TELLING YOU THE NOTE AND ROSE WERE QUIETLY SLIPPED BENEATH THE DOOR SOMETIME DURING THE NIGHT!! THERE'S NO WAY IN HELL YOU COULD KNOW ABOUT IT.
ROSES ARE VERY FRAGRANT!! I'M SURE I WOULD HAVE SMELLED IT AND INVESTIGATED!!
YEAH! DID YOU ROLL FOR THAT?
C'MON SARA!! READ IT OUT LOUD!! WHAT DOES IT SAY??
Please accept this rose as a token of our appreciation! Your generous donation allowed us to buy enough seed for planting to ensure a bountiful harvest! The citizens of Blightdale thank you! While you are a guest in our town, please allow me to cover all your expenses. Just present the rose to any merchant, and your bill will be applied to my account.
Sincerely, Devin McDain, Mayor of Blightdale
DON'T YOU THINK YOU SHOULD WAKE US UP SO WE CAN EXAMINE IT??
IT'S A MAP ISN'T IT?? HUH?? IS IT A MAP??
HMMMMMMM ...
DON'T FORGET I CALLED DIBS ON THE ROSE!!
I THINK FOR THE TIME BEING I'LL JUST KEEP THE LETTER AND ROSE TO MYSELF AND NOT MENTION IT. I'M GOING TO GET DRESSED AND GO DOWNSTAIRS TO HAVE BREAKFAST. I'LL STOP BY THE GUYS' ROOM AND ASK THEM IF THEY WANT TO JOIN ME. WHILE THEY ARE GETTING DRESSED, I'LL GO AHEAD AND FIND A TABLE AND BE SEATED.
VILE WENCH!! I AIN'T EATIN' NO STINKIN' BREAKFAST WITH THE LIKES OF YOU!! YOU'RE GONNA KEEP SECRETS FROM YOUR COMRADES??
I COMING WITH YOU!! I DON'T NEED TO GET DRESSED. I SLEEP IN MY ARMOR!
I THOUGHT THERE WAS SOMETHING FISHY ABOUT HER WANTING HER OWN ROOM!!
I'M GOING TO SNEAK DOWN THE STAIRS BEHIND SARA AND ATTEMPT TO PICK HER POCKET! I'LL BE GOING FOR THE LETTER!!
I'M NOT GOING TO ALLOW THAT! YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW THE LETTER EXISTS!!
KNUCKLES CAN TELL SHE WAS HIDING SOMETHING!!
JUST LET IT GO, BOB!!

A FEW MINUTES LATER...

THE **INNKEEPER** BRINGS YOU THE FINAL BILL AND IS JUST ABOUT TO ASK YOU TO SETTLE YOUR BILL WHEN HE NOTICES THE **ROSE** STICKING OUT OF **SARA'S** VEST POCKET. HE SMILES WARMLY AND TEARS UP THE BILL. "**NO CHARGE**," HE SAYS!!

NO CHARGE?? BUT I ORDERED THE **GOLD PLATE SPECIAL** WITH A SIDE ORDER OF **LIVER-SQUEEZINGS**!!

YEAH!! AND HE INSISTED ON SEEING THAT WE HAD **HARD COIN** IN OUR POUCHES BEFORE EVEN SERVING US!!

I LEAVE A TIP!

IT'S ALMOST AS IF HE'D BEEN **CHARMED**!!

I WONDER WHAT COULD MAKE **SKIN-FLINT WINCEY** CHANGE HIS TUNE SO QUICKLY??

I KNEW IT!! IT'S THE **ROSE**!! IT HAS **MAGICAL POWERS**!! DIRK-FING BLAST!!

C'MON SARA!! YOU HOLDING OUT ON US?

WHAT'S WITH THE **ROSE**?

GUYS, I **SWEAR**!! THE ROSE IS **NOT** MAGIC!!

AN HOUR LATER...

OKAY, SARA, YOU SHOW THE **ROSE** TO THE **STABLE MASTER**, AND HE GIVES YOU A **KNOWING WINK** AND MOTIONS FOR YOU TO PUT AWAY YOUR **COIN POUCH**!!

I ASK HIM TO HAVE THE **HORSE** RESHOD!! I'LL PICK HIM UP AFTER I RUN MY ERRANDS!!

HE'S GIVING YOU A **WARHORSE** WITH **FULL BARDING**??

AGAIN WITH THE **FREAKIN' ROSE**!!

MUMBLE MUMBLE

THAT'S IT!! I CAN'T STAND IT ANY LONGER!! YOU'RE DELIBERATELY **PUSHING** MY BUTTONS BY FLAUNTING THE **POWER** OF THE **ROSE**! AREN'T YOU?? **THE ROSE MUST BE MINE**!! WHAT'S YOUR PRICE?? HUH?? HOW MUCH FOR THE **ROSE**, GIRLY??

BRIAN, I **SWEAR** BY ALL THAT'S **HOLY** AND **NOBLE**!! THE **ROSE** IS **NOT MAGICAL**!! PLEASE BELIEVE ME!!

WHOAH!! IF YOU'RE SELLING I WANT TO BID!!

ME TOO!!

HOW ABOUT 2,000 GOLD PIECES??

YOU CALL **THAT** A REASONABLE BID?? **HAA**!! LEAVE IT TO **TEFLON BILLY** TO TRY AND CHEAT A FRIEND!! I TELL YOU WHAT, SARA, I'LL GIVE YOU **THREE THOUSAND** IN **GEMSTONES**!! RIGHT NOW!! RIGHT HERE!!

HEY THAT'S WHAT **I** WAS GOING TO BID!!! WAIT YER TURN!!

GUYS, REALLY, IT'S JUST A ... A ... **THREE THOUSAND**??

FOUR GEES!! I BID **FOUR GEES**!

TWENTY MINUTES LATER...

OKAY, OKAY, THIS **BIDDING WAR** IS GETTING A LITTLE TEDIOUS. IT'S **OBVIOUS** YOU **ALL** WANT THE **ROSE** AND ARE WILLING TO SPARE **NO EXPENSE**!! SO I'LL MAKE IT EASY FOR YOU. I'M GOING TO LET IT GO FOR **TEN THOUSAND GOLD PIECES**!! BUT YOU'LL HAVE TO **ROLL DICE** FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO BUY IT. **HIGH ROLLER** GETS FIRST CHANCE!!

C'MON! LET'S ROLL!!

LOOKS LIKE A JOB FOR MY **LUCKY TEN-SIDER**!!

WELL, I GUESS THAT'S FAIR.

MOMENTS LATER...

THE ROSE IS MINE!! GIMME! GIMME! **GIMME**!!

ALL RIGHT, THE **ROSE** IS **YOURS**!! WE CAN COMPLETE THE TRANSACTION **AFTER** WE LEAVE **BLIGHTDALE**!! I DON'T LIKE HAVING **THAT** MUCH **CASH** ON ME WHILE IN **TOWN**!!

LUCKY STIFF!!

DAMN!

YEAH, YEAH, WHATEVER!!

LATER THAT SAME NIGHT...

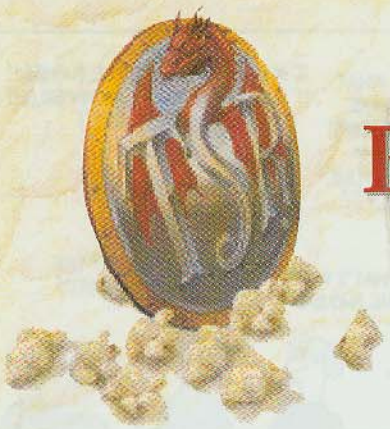
SORRY BRI!! POINTING THE **ROSE** AT THE **SWACK IRON DRAGON** A **THIRD TIME** AND DEMANDING, "**GIMME YER HORDE**!" DOESN'T SEEM TO HAVE ANY **EFFECT**! THE **GIANT BEAST** COMMENCES TO TEARING YOU TO PIECES!!

I **TOLD** YOU IT WASN'T **MAGICAL**, BRIAN.

DAMN SHAME!! IT MUST BE OUT OF **CHARGES** OR SOMETHING!!

DUDE, YOU WERE ROBBED!!

KNIGHTS OF THE DINNER TABLE™ © KENZERCO 1998 • SEND STORY IDEAS TO JOLLYRB@AOL.COM OR **KODT**, 1003 MONROE PIKE, MARION IN 46953

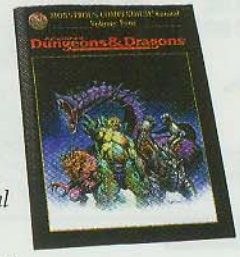


Previews

DECEMBER

Monstrous Compendium® Annual, Volume 4

An AD&D® Game Accessory
By TSR Staff



Populate your world with more nasty creatures! This fourth installment of the *Monstrous Compendium Annual* contains the best monster entries from accessories, adventures, and boxed sets produced during the year.

$19.95/$26.95 CAN
TSR 2173
ISBN 0-7869-1212-X

The Lost Shrine of Bundushatur

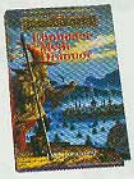
An AD&D Game RPGA® Network Adventure
By Michael D. Wagner

Buried for more than a century, the ancient temple of Bundushatur has resurfaced. What lurks within its catacombs? This is a setting in the classic style of AD&D adventures. Intrepid adventurers can explore the musty corridors, discovering treasure … and something darker.

$9.95/$12.95 CAN
TSR 9573
ISBN 0-7869-1194-8

Elminster in Myth Drannor

A Forgotten Realms® Paperback Novel
By Ed Greenwood

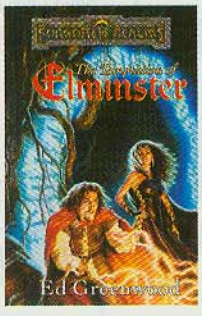


Elminster in Myth Drannor, now in paperback, is the sequel to the bestselling *Elminster: The Making of a Mage*. To learn about elven ways and magic, young Elminster travels to Cormanthyr, where political intrigue and otherworldly sorceries abound.

$5.99/$6.99 CAN
TSR 8575P
ISBN 0-7869-1190-5

The Temptation of Elminster

A Forgotten Realms Hardcover Novel
By Ed Greenwood



The saga of the young Elminster continues! Myth Drannor has fallen, and glorious Cormanthyr lies in ruins. Elminster emerges from the rubble to serve new, human masters. Will the price of wizardly power be the young mage's very soul?

$21.99/$28.99 CAN
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ISBN 0-7869-1189-1

The Inner Planes

An AD&D Game Planescape® Accessory
By Monte Cook & William W. Connors

Of all the planes in the multiverse, none are as hostile to mortal life as the Inner Planes. From Fire to Water, Ooze to Ice, Lightning to Ash, they spring from the basic elements, from energy itself. This campaign expansion, with an accompanying adventure, tests your survival skills, revealing secrets of the Inner Planes sure to startle even the most jaded explorer.

$19.95/$26.95 CAN
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ISBN 0-7869-0736-3

On the Verge

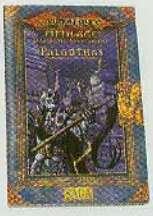
A Star*Drive™ Paperback Novel
By Roland Green

The second novel in the all-new Star*Drive book line thrusts the Concord Marines into desperate action on the frontier of civilized space.

$5.99/$6.99 CAN
TSR 2814
ISBN 0-7869-1191-3

Palanthas

A Dragonlance®: Fifth Age® Dramatic Supplement
By Steven "Stan!" Brown



Palanthas is the first detailed look at Ansalon's best known city. Now players and Narrators can make it their home, exploring the Great Library, the underground thieves' network, even the cursed site where the Tower of High Sorcery once stood. Palanthas is an excellent background source for the *Seeds of Chaos* adventure.

$11.95/$15.95 CAN
TSR 9588
ISBN 0-7869-1199-9

A Guide to Marvel Earth

A Marvel Super Heroes™ Adventure Game Accessory
By Matt Grau, Harold Johnson, Stephen Kenson, Bill Olmesdahl, & Mike Selinker

The top-secret material in this guide comes straight to you from the desk of Nick Fury. This official S.H.I.E.L.D.

report details the homes, equipment, and secrets of some of your favorite super heroes and super villains. Great for Narrators and players alike, the guide is lifted from the files of the greatest espionage organization on Marvel Earth!

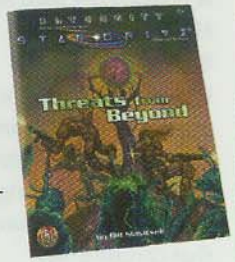
$15.95/$19.95 CAN
TSR 6929
ISBN 0-7869-1230-8

JANUARY

Threats from Beyond

An ALTERNITY® Game STAR*DRIVE Accessory
By Bill Slavicsek

Threats from Beyond reveals details of the emerging alien menace known as the Externals. These unfathomable creatures have begun an invasion that could result in the end of human history—unless heroes of the STAR*DRIVE campaign step forward to stop them. Includes guidelines for using this material to expand existing campaigns.



$16.95/$21.95 CAN
TSR 2815
ISBN 0-7869-1218-9

The Shattered Circle

An AD&D Game Adventure
By Bruce Cordell

The ancient circle of standing stones has existed untouched for centuries—until now. A strange force has destroyed part of the circle, breaking its ancient wards. Can your heroes solve the mystery of its destruction and determine what the wards held at bay before it's too late? Find out with this exciting adventure for 1st-level player characters.

$8.95/$12.95 CAN
TSR 11325
ISBN 0-7869-1325-8

TSR NEWS

Free ALTERNITY Adventures

The A-Team released two free adventures on the TSR Homepage (www.tsr.com): David Anderson's *Hunters & Collectors* and Jonathan Jochum's *Formid Station*. Both of these adventures are generic in nature, capable of being placed in any starfaring campaign setting. They're located in the downloads section of the ALTERNITY game page.

The TransVerge News (TVN) Network is also hard at work bringing you the latest information regarding what's happening in the Verge. Serving as an update site to the STAR*DRIVE Campaign Setting, these news briefs are located in the TVN News section of the STAR*DRIVE webpage. You can reach the main page by pointing your browser at: http://www.tsr.com/StarDrive/Welcome.html.

At TVN, you'll find the latest information on the situation in the Hammer's Star system, updated commodity prices for Verge systems, intelligence reports, available survey missions, the Verge Most Wanted list, and more.

Marvel Contest Winners

Having spent a respectable amount of time (if not seriousness) in reviewing our entries, we come back with the following rulings on the MARVEL SUPER HEROES™ Adventure Game Contest:

Runners-Up

Phil Martin (Newcastle, England) for Para-Man, first appearance Marvel Feature #7 (1972)

David Oakes (Rooklyn Park, MN) for 3-D Man, first appearance Marvel Premiere #35 (1978)

John Polojac (Jeannette, PA) for Vulcan the Weaponsmith, first appearance Black Goliath #3 (1976)

Grand Prize Winner

William C. Osborn II (La Porte, IN) for Spirit of '76, first appearance Invaders #6 (1976), and Shooting Star, first appearance Incredible Hulk #265 (1981)

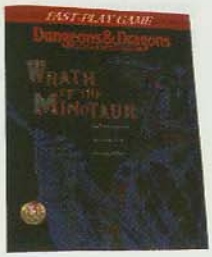
Ravenloft Netbook

Speaking of contests, first place in the "Terror from Above" competition (from *DRAGON Magazine* issue #244) went to David Wu; the runners up were John Mangrum, Amber E. McRae, and Matthew Sernett. Keith D. Barger won for Most Disgusting Entry, and Larry "Bud" Ecklor took home the Weirdest Entry honors. All the "Terror from Above" entries have been compiled into a netbook. If you are looking for horrific flying monsters, you must check out this collection! It, along with several other netbooks about the Demiplane of Dread, is available at the Kargatane website: **www.kargatane.com**.

D&D® Fast-Play Game: Wrath of the Minotaur

A D&D Starter Kit and Adventure
By Jeff Grubb

The perfect way to introduce new players to the AD&D game, role-playing, and the fine art of Dungeon Mastering. Includes the celebrated D&D Fast-Play Game, an extended step-by-step tutorial for new DMs by one of the top designers in the industry, and an exciting adventure that takes starting heroes into a terrible dungeon to face the wrath of its guardian—a dreaded minotaur! Use this as a stand-alone introduction or combine it with the forthcoming *Eye of the Wyvern* adventure for a more epic story.



$4.95/$6.95 CAN
TSR 11331
ISBN 0-7869-1331-2

Coming Attractions

Cover by Rebecca Guay

Psi Kits

By Owen K.C. Stephens and Lloyd Brown III

Ten—count 'em—ten new kits for psionicist characters, from the charcoal burner to the specialist.

The New Illithid Arsenal

By Christopher Schwartz

New weapons, vehicles, and minions for the most despicable of psionic adversaries, the mind flayers.

Starship Perks & Flaws

By David Eckelberry & Andy Collins

Customize your spacecraft with these new rules and sample ships for the ALTERNITY® game.

Dark Legacy

Fiction by Mel Odom

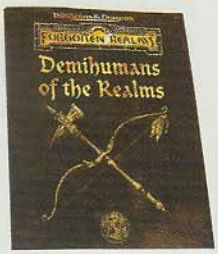
Before the Threat from the Sea saga, one merman priest knew the danger of the Taker.

Plus "Knights of the Dinner Table," "SAGE ADVICE™," "DRAGONMIRTH™," and more.

$4.95 U.S./$6.50 CAN
TSR Product No. 8116-101

Demihumans of the Realms

A FORGOTTEN REALMS Accessory
By Roger E. Moore

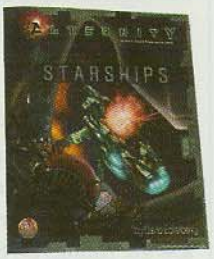


In the tradition of *Warriors & Priests of the Realms* and *Wizards & Rogues of the Realms*, this volume features more than three dozen kits for the demihuman races: elves, half-elves, dwarves, gnomes, and halflings. It features everything you need to create demihuman characters with a distinct Realmsian flavor. Each kit includes local culture and customs, historical influences and fashion, unique class abilities and proficiencies, social class, and roleplaying notes to help you breathe life into every character.

$18.95/$27.95 CAN
TSR 11316
ISBN 0-7869-1316-9

Starships

An ALTERNITY Game Accessory
By David Eckelberry



Starships provides both players and Gamemasters with a wealth of information that expands the possibilities of spaceship construction. It includes a list of new equipment for campaigns ranging from the Fusion Age (PL 6) to the Energy Age (PL 8) as well as more than 16 different deck plans for ships ranging from one-man fighters to military corvettes. *Starships* also explores the properties of drivespace and alternate methods of FTL travel for campaigns, such as jump gates and hyperspace.

$18.95/$27.95 CAN
TSR 11319
ISBN 0-7869-1319-3

Rising Tide

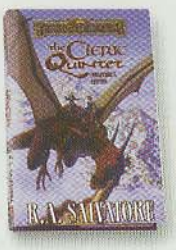
The Threat from the Sea, Book 1
A FORGOTTEN REALMS Paperback Novel
By Mel Odom

In the first book of a sweeping new FORGOTTEN REALMS series, an evil warlord from the depths of the Trackless Sea rallies the undersea races of Toril in a surprise attack on the Sword Coast. This novel shares a setting with the *Sea of Fallen Stars* adventure boxed set.

$5.99/$7.95 CAN
TSR 21312
ISBN 0-7869-1312-6

The Cleric Quintet Collector's Edition

A FORGOTTEN REALMS Hardcover Novel
By R.A. Salvatore



Here for the first time in a single volume are the books by the *New York Times* bestselling author R.A. Salvatore that chronicle the adventures of the scholar-priest Cadderly of the Edificant Library. A collector's edition for fans of the FORGOTTEN REALMS adventure setting and R.A. Salvatore.

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The Soulforge

A DRAGONLANCE® Paperback Novel
By Margaret Weis

A paperback reprint of the novel that describes the early years of Raistlin, archmage of Krynn and one of the most popular characters of the DRAGONLANCE setting. The *New York Times* bestselling author Margaret Weis writes about her favorite character in this revealing and important tale.

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Bridges of Time Series
A DRAGONLANCE Paperback Novel
By Jean Rabe

Amid the wreckage of the Chaos War, a new kind of magic arises on the world of Krynn. To study this magic, Goldmoon, Hero of the Lance, founds the Citadel of Light, as described in this novel by best-selling author Jean Rabe. Does this magic offer hope, or does it spell a new doom for the inhabitants of Krynn if it falls into the wrong hands?

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FEBRUARY

Van Richten's Monster Hunter's Compendium, Volume One

An AD&D RAVENLOFT® Accessory

Collected for the first time, Dr. Rudolph van Richten's guides to the most terrifying creatures of the night—vampires, werebeasts, and golems! Add an element of horror to any fantasy adventure with the secrets and details revealed herein. Updated and presented for use with any AD&D campaign, including the RAVENLOFT setting.

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Dungeons of Despair

An AD&D Adventure Anthology
Edited by Christopher Perkins

Need a challenge for your player characters? Try these exciting scenarios drawn from the pages of *DUNGEON® Adventures*. Includes adventures from the earliest issues, updated and ready to play. Are your heroes brave enough to enter the deepest, darkest dungeons and the wildest wilderness settings anywhere? For player characters of 2nd to 4th level.

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The Sylvan Veil

An AD&D and SAGA® Supplement
William W. Connors and Miranda Horner

This epic adventure is rich with source material and drama revolving around the land of the elves. It includes history, lore, legendary heroes, and a quest beyond the magical Silvanesti Shield. Inspired by a story concept by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman.

$18.95/$27.95 CAN
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D&D Fast-Play Game: Eye of the Wyvern

A D&D Starter Kit and Adventure #2
By Jeff Grubb

Tips & tricks for running a wilderness adventure! Perfect for introducing new players to the AD&D game, roleplaying, and Dungeon Mastering. Includes the D&D Fast-Play Game, an extended step-by-step tutorial for new DMs, and an exciting adventure that takes starting heroes into the uncharted wilderness to face the fury of a wyvern! Use this alone or combine it with *Wrath of the Minotaur* for a more epic story.

$4.95/$6.95 CAN
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Planet of Darkness

An ALTERNITY® Game STAR*DRIVE Accessory
By Christopher Perkins

Under a veil of darkness lies half of the planet Lison, cloaked in its own shadow.

Don't Miss the 1998 DRAGON Magazine Annual!

Featuring ...

By Dragons Ruled and Divided
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The ultimate "Wyrms of the North" compendium, detailing the geographical domains of the mightiest dragons in Faerûn. Includes a two-page color map of the Sword Coast.

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Fighting styles and sword masters from the GREYHAWK® campaign.

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A "Rogues Gallery" of new heroes and villains from one of the best-selling FORGOTTEN REALMS® novelists.

Plus "Arcane Lore," "Bazaar of the Bizarre," "Dragon's Bestiary," "DRAGONMIRTH," and more!

The *DRAGON Magazine Annual* is free to subscribers. Available on newsstands in November.

$5.99 U.S./$6.99 CAN
TSR Product No. 8115-13

Coming Attractions

Cover by Tony DiTerlizzi

Deep Trouble in Telthin

By John A. Hartshorne

A feud between a water elementalist and a marid caliph spills over into the Prime Material Plane. An AD&D® adventure for levels 10–12.

No Stone Unturned

By Peter C. Spahn

Who's conducting an archaeological excavation beneath the city of Jevid, and what are they searching for? An AD&D adventure for levels 3–5.

Mistress on the Mere

By Paul Culotta

Fearless vampire hunters are needed in the fourth adventure of the Mere of Dead Men series. An AD&D FORGOTTEN REALMS® adventure for levels 5–7.

Under a Pale Moon

By Jason Carl

The Moon Steps are a place of wonder and magic—and danger. A DRAGONLANCE®: FIFTH AGE® dramatic supplement and AD&D adventure for levels 2–4.

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TSR Product No. 8207–09

Below the surface of the planet, inhabitants continue to mine the precious metals that guarantee their livelihood. Heroes negotiating for supplies soon find themselves embroiled in the machinations of competing stellar nations, facing off against treacherous black marketeers, and dodging the threat of pirates and cykoteks. The adventure culminates with the discovery of something that could change the balance of power in the Oberon system forever.

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A group of adventurers stumbles across a buried city guarded by a powerful undead force. Secrets, thrills, and daring heroics punctuate this action-packed story that shares the setting of the game product *Empires of the Shining Sea.*

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This publication for the DRAGONLANCE Saga includes interviews with the people who work on the books and game products, information about upcoming releases, articles written by fans, and other interesting items exclusive to this publication. The fourth issue should be hitting mailboxes near you soon, but you can still sign up in time to receive the first issue of 1999. To start your subscription, visit www.tsr.com to fill out the electronic form, write to legends@wizards.com, or send a letter to LEGENDS OF THE LANCE Newsletter; P.O. Box 707, Renton, WA 98057-0707. Be sure to include your name and mailing address.

The Unspeakable Oaf by John Kovalic

Knights of the Dinner Table™

IS A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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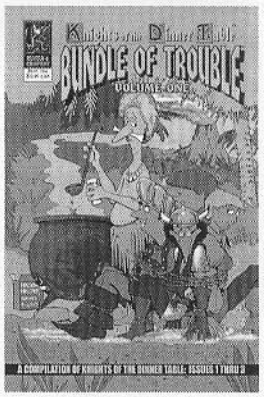
HEY TY!!! WHERE THE HELL DID YOU GO??? I THOUGHT WE AGREED TO CHARGE THE DRAGON ON THE COUNT OF THREE?? I'M STANDING IN FRONT OF OL' ROT GUT ALL ALONE HERE!!!
I HAD SECOND THOUGHTS AT THE LAST MINUTE. I REMEMBERED AN OLD RULE-OF-THUMB I LEARNED AT THE HACKMASTER ACADEMY. IF YOU MULTIPLY A DRAGON'S LENGTH IN FEET BY THE NUMBER OF TEETH, YOU HAVE A FAIR APPROXIMATION OF HIS TOTAL HIT POINTS. I FIGURE IT'S AROUND 2500 HIT POINTS. DOING SOME QUICK MATH, I REALIZED THAT EVEN IF WE BOTH ROLLED CRITICAL HITS THE BEST WE COULD DO IN DAMAGE WOULD BE 975 POINTS!! AN EXERCISE IN FUTILITY.
TY, YOU COULD HAVE MENTIONED THAT TO DAVE BEFORE HE RUSHED INTO THE DRAGON'S LAIR?
HMMMM. I WAS GUESSING 2496 HIT POINTS. BUT YOU HAD THE RIGHT IDEA, TY.
WOW!! YOU WERE ONLY FIVE HIT POINTS OFF!! I'M WRITING THAT RULE DOWN.



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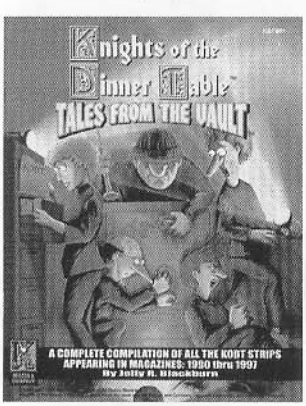
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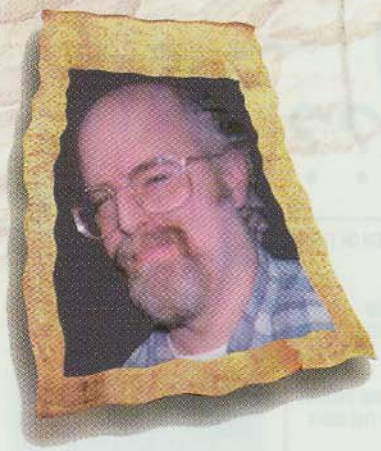

JEFF EASLEY

TSR's senior artist has painted the covers of all the AD&D core rulebooks, and he still hasn't tired of dragons. "There's nothing else I would rather paint!"

by Allen Varney

How does a small-town Kentucky boy become TSR's leading cover artist? Jeff Easley offers a typically humble explanation: "I'm a poster boy for being in the right place at the right time.

"I heard through a mutual friend that [artist] Larry Elmore had been hired at TSR," the 44-year-old painter recalls. "So I called him, and he said they were looking for other artists. I'd heard of TSR, though I wasn't terribly aware of what RPGs actually were. I dropped them a line, sent some samples, and got an interview. That was 1979, 1980."

If you wonder what happened next, you must not have seen the AD&D® *Player's Handbook*, *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide*, *Tome of Magic*, the *MONSTROUS MANUAL™* book, and over a dozen *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM®* supplements, as well as several editions of the basic D&D® box and many, many more. They all sport colorful, powerful Easley covers, the embodiment of AD&D. Easley might have lured more people into roleplaying than anyone else.

"The right place at the right time"—Easley's story sounds simple enough, but it misses a couple of real oddities. After what he calls "a typical small-town childhood" in Nicholasville (tobacco country south of Lexington), Easley received some conventional training (a BFA degree in painting from Murray State University in western Kentucky). Oddity 1: Where in this background do we find dragons and monsters?

Yet Easley went for monsters right from the start, with comic-book work for 1970s horror magazines like *Creepy* and *Vampirella*. Then, at TSR in the '80s, he became the top monster man. His fellow staff artists from that time speak with one voice: "Jeff does great monsters, because he enjoys doing them" (Larry Elmore). "Jeff grew up with old monster movies—Universal, Hammer horror films, *Famous Monsters of Filmland* magazine. I always admired his ability to come up with monsters out of his head" (Clyde Caldwell). "Undead are his forte. Not many [artists] can do rotting flesh as well as he can" (Dave "Diesel" LaForce).

Oddity 2: For all his skill and long experience, Easley has little to say about his methods. "I get a flash in my mind's eye of an interesting angle. Then I do a drawing—I don't use any photographic reference or anything like that. When I do the painting, I have a general color scheme in mind." Artistic techniques? "I strictly use oils; I never took to acrylic. They dry slower, but I paint thin." So what makes a good Jeff Easley painting? "I look for kind of a mungy, attention-grabbing painting." That's what he says, "mungy." And not much more.

Yes, Easley has little to say—until you get to know him. Elmore: "Jeff is a quiet, shy guy, but once you get to know him, he can talk your leg off." Caldwell: "In a group he doesn't say a lot, but then he'll interject a comment and crack everyone up. I laughed more at TSR than at any time in my life, and Jeff was the main reason."

Where Easley only says, "I collect a lot of stuff at flea markets," friends amplify. LaForce: "He dabbles in just about anything related to fantasy and science fiction: robots, ray guns, ancient swords and helmets, movie posters, monster magazines ... His Halloween collection occupies a quarter of a room." Easley owns perhaps the country's best spook-show collection, masks and paraphernalia from the horror/magic shows that toured schools nationwide in the 1950s and '60s.

The shy Kentucky man tells little of himself, but his friends are unanimous: "A real great guy"—"The greatest guy in the world"—"One of the best artists TSR has ever had."

Lately Easley is doing more freelance work, including designing gold-and-ivory dragon inlays for deluxe limited-edition guitars. Yet "I'm perfectly happy working for Wizards/TSR," he says, though relocating from tiny Lake Geneva, Wisconsin to Seattle would be "quite an adjustment. I'm pretty well dug-in in this community. My wife works at the YMCA here; we know a lot of our neighbors. I'm a small-town kind of guy." But he's been working at home for a while and misses going in to work. Is he moving? He says simply, "I'm playing it by ear."

Any advice for new artists? As usual, Easley keeps it short: "If you love the work enough to stay with it and apply yourself, eventually you'll be in that right place at the right time."

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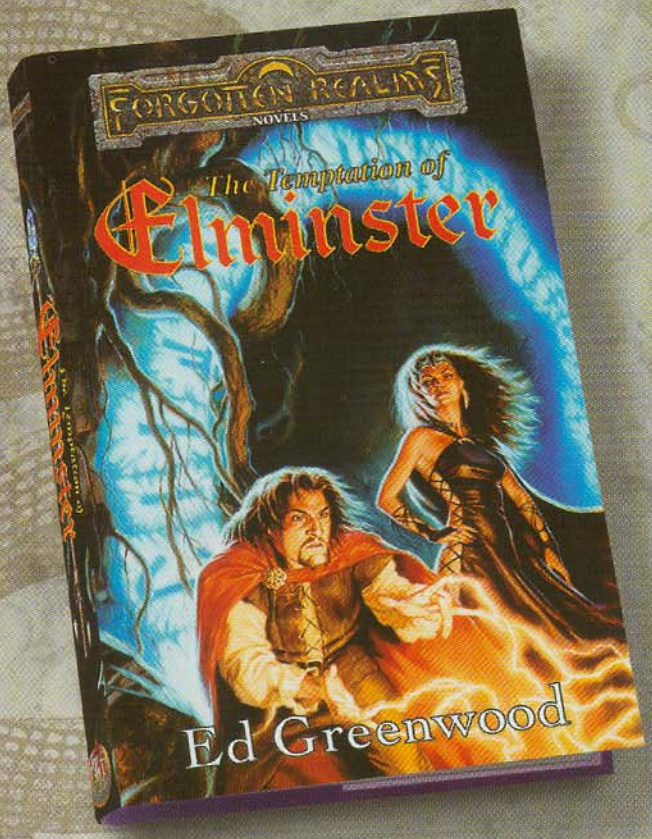

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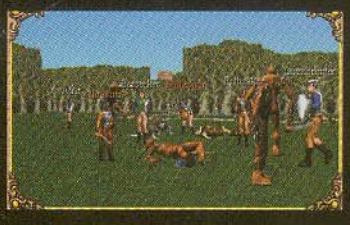

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